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The four-day 'red' weeks in the European Parliament's calendar above are Strasbourg weeks. The red 24-hour 'mini-plenary' sittings are in Brussels.

# A tale of two cities

The political, financial, environmental and social impact of the European Parliament's 'two-seat' arrangement

Report for the Brussels-Strasbourg Seat Study Group  
[www.brusselsstrasbourgstudy.eu](http://www.brusselsstrasbourgstudy.eu)  
Chairman Edward McMillan-Scott MEP, Vice-President of the European Parliament  
Brussels/Strasbourg, February 2011

*"Il fallait aussi composer avec un problème que j'ai découvert avec stupeur: celui d'une assemblée contrainte de travailler en trois lieux différents. (...) Ce système existe depuis maintenant trente ans, coûte des fortunes, et ne soulève à peu près aucun tollé, et même aucune question. Les journalistes, pourtant friands de gaspillage financiers, demeurent curieusement muets sur la question. Si je n'accepte pas d'être taxée d'anti européenisme, je n'ai jamais dissimulé mon hostilité à cet éparpillement. Dès mon élection j'ai alerté tout le monde sur ce gâchis de temps et d'argent, réfléchi à une éventuelle utilisation des immenses locaux strasbourgeois - pourquoi ne pas y installer une université européenne, par exemple? -, mais en pure perte."*<sup>1</sup>

- Simone Veil, *Une Vie*<sup>2</sup>.

(Simone Veil was the first President of the directly elected European Parliament, from 1979 to 1982)

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<sup>1</sup> "I also had to deal with a problem I was stunned to discover: that of an assembly forced to work in three different places. (...) This system has existed for thirty years now, costs a fortune, yet it doesn't lead to an outcry, it doesn't even raise questions. Journalists, who are normally so fond of financial waste, remain curiously silent on the matter. While I don't accept to be accused of anti-Europeanism, I've never hidden my hostility to this dispersion. As soon as I got elected I alerted everyone to the situation and thought a lot about an alternative use for the immense Strasbourg buildings - why not install a European university, for instance? - but to no avail." (Translation: MvH)

<sup>2</sup> Paris, Stock, 2007.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michiel van Hulst is an independent consultant based in Brussels. From 1999 to 2004 he served as a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for the Dutch Labour Party, of which he later became chairman. As an MEP he was a member of the European Parliament's Budgetary Control Committee and founder of the Campaign for Parliament Reform, a cross-party group of 100 MEPs dedicated to making the European Parliament (EP) more accountable to its citizens.

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. In the current climate of economic austerity and with the European Parliament (EP) assuming new powers and responsibilities under the Lisbon Treaty, **a proper and full debate on the EP's working arrangements is unavoidable**. It is also necessary in view of the Parliament's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint, and to respond to the apparently changing attitudes of MEPs to their working arrangements. Most want one place of work. The two-seat arrangement was a decision taken by EU governments in 1992 and codified in the Treaty in 1997.
2. **An Attitude Survey of MEPs and Assistants by Zurich University in 2011 shows 88% want the EP to have the right to decide where it meets, with 91% preferring Brussels<sup>3</sup> (see Annex 5)**. According to a major tracking survey conducted by the academic European Parliament Research Group, over two-thirds of MEPs (69% in 2000, 72% in 2006, and 70% in 2010) consistently want one Seat, in Brussels (see Annex 3). A Campaign for Parliament Reform survey in 2007 revealed 90% of MEPs favour a single Seat, with 85% in favour of the EP's right to decide its own Seat and 82% in favour of Brussels (see Annex 4). A survey of EP staff conducted by the EP's internal newsletter Newshound in 2005 showed that 72% favoured a single Seat in Brussels.
3. **On 21 October 2010 EP Vice-President Edward McMillan-Scott MEP announced the setting up of an 'informal cross-party Seat Study Group'** to examine all issues related to the Seat question, including cost, environmental impact, history, treaties, efficiency, buildings, facilities, transport links, accommodation, and security. The Group's core consists of senior MEPs.
4. Despite much discussion and media comment, few objective and up-to-date facts are known on the two-seat arrangement. **There have been no official EP reports or debates on the issue for over 18 years**. For the current legislature, with a more diverse Parliament now comprising 27 Member States, with different historical perspectives, the intention of the Seat Study is to remedy that lack of information in an objective manner.
5. **This report is based on face-to-face (or in some cases telephone) interviews and/or meetings with 30 MEPs, assistants, EP secretariat officials, members of political group staff and member state representatives, conducted in Brussels and Strasbourg in late 2010**. It also makes use of email messages received subsequently, other available data and desk research. Most MEPs chose to speak off the record; there appears to be a code of silence on the issue which this report may help to dispel, so as to allow a proper debate to take place.
6. **The additional cost of maintaining three places of work is currently estimated by Parliament's administration to be around €180 million per annum**. In 2002 it was estimated that if Parliament had a single Seat, 317 full-time staff posts could be abolished<sup>4</sup>. That figure is likely to have increased following enlargement.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.brusselsstrasbourgstudy.eu/3.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.brusselsstrasbourgstudy.eu/resources/Report+to+the+Bureau+on+3+Places+of+Work.pdf>

7. A report commissioned by two MEPs in 2007 concluded that **the adoption of a single Seat in Brussels would save almost 19.000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> every year.**
8. Those interviewed have pointed to the spate of logistical and technical problems in recent months and years which have undermined Parliament's ability to conduct its business effectively, especially in Strasbourg. These have included the collapse of the Chamber ceiling there during the 2008 summer recess and other structural problems then discovered; airport closures due to the 'ash cloud' and other travel issues, notably strikes; and the fact that **only six EU national capitals (one of them Paris) now have direct air connections to Strasbourg** (see Annex 2)
9. The Parliament's monthly move has an impact on individual MEPs, assistants, officials and others who have to make the trip. Informal contact with the EP's Medical Service suggests that people are under greater stress due to the monthly '*transhumance*'. **Hotel availability and profiteering in Strasbourg is considered a serious and growing problem.** Anecdotal evidence and spot-checks suggest that Strasbourg hotels routinely as much as double their prices during plenary sessions.
10. **With three exceptions (an EP Secretariat official, the French Permanent Representative to the EU and the Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg) the arguments put forward during the research for this report would lead to the European Parliament having a single Seat, in Brussels.** Many are fond of Strasbourg as a city and say they would miss it despite the logistical difficulties - but they think it would be more efficient and politically more effective to be based in Brussels.
11. They were unanimous in their view that **if the Parliament moves to Brussels, alternatives will have to be found for the Strasbourg complex of buildings and hemicycle, both for France as a member state and for Strasbourg as a city.** A number of suggestions were made, including academic, security-related and institutional relocation.
12. What is clear from the interviews conducted for this report is that, **more than anything else, MEPs believe they, and they alone, should have the right to determine Parliament's working arrangements, including the location of its Seat.**
13. **The way forward most of those interviewed seem to favour is to raise the issue in the context of Treaty change.** One option would be to do so in the next Intergovernmental Conference, for example over the accession of a new member state to the EU, once the settled will of MEPs was known.
14. The EP is showing a renewed appetite for improving the way it functions under the Lisbon Treaty. **If the political will can be harnessed and an open debate is allowed to take place based on factual and objective information, the Seat question can be placed firmly back on the agenda.** In the current economic climate, and with the environment as a priority, the debate is urgently necessary.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The European Parliament (EP) is no longer the talking shop it once was. It has been given significant additional powers and is now a full co-legislator with the Council. It has grown from an Assembly with nominated representatives of six nationalities to a directly-elected Parliament representing 27 nations and 500 million people. Of its 21 working languages, eleven have been added in the last decade.

MEPs now have co-decision in almost all areas of EU activity. This implies a vastly greater workload, especially in the EP's all-important committees. A new automated system allows MEPs to table amendments electronically. In one month recently, 15.000 amendments were tabled. The pace of committee work is becoming much more intense.

Frequent and direct interaction with the other EU institutions, in particular Council, Commission and the new European External Action Service, is becoming increasingly important. Links with national parliaments are deepening as a result of their yellow and orange card "warning" procedures as well as stronger committee-level working relationships.

It is an increasingly 'political' Europe, in which the trans-national parties, with headquarters in Brussels, funded partly by the EP - as well as their associated foundations - play a greater role. For example, these parties now organise pre-Summit gatherings of their political families and also coordinate positions in routine portfolio Council meetings.

On 20 October 2010, EP President Jerzy Buzek, in his mid-term remarks to the plenary, noted that the Lisbon Treaty had "given us new powers but also new responsibilities." He called for Parliament to become more efficient in its use of resources, stating: "as Parliamentarians who are co-responsible for the Union's budget we understand that in today's economic climate, we have to be ambitious with our funding and we need to explore the possibilities of better pooling resources, better savings, and better financial management."

The Parliament's two-seat arrangement has important consequences for the way it operates and the way it is perceived. Although MEPs co-decide with the EU Council in almost all EU policy areas, they cannot decide where and when they meet.

In the light of all these factors, Edward McMillan-Scott, Vice-President of the EP responsible for Democracy and Human Rights and Chairman of the Audit Panel, wrote to EP President Jerzy Buzek on 20 October to announce the setting up of a 'cross-party Informal Seat Study Group'. He wrote:

"There have been no debates or resolutions in recent years but the two-seat arrangement generates public scorn, especially at a time of economic stringency. We need to work efficiently, particularly in relation to national parliaments and the other EU institutions. We should also consider the interests of our Seat(s) host countries.

Despite much discussion and media comment, few objective and up-to-date facts are known. The intention of the Seat Study is to correct that lack of information."<sup>5</sup>

In the same letter Mr McMillan-Scott set out the following terms of reference for the Study Group, which is composed of senior MEPs and former MEPs:

"Examination of all relevant issues connected with the Seat(s) of the EP, to be completed in advance of the EP Bureau's away-days on 10-11 January 2011. It will cover the following areas; cost, environmental impact, history, treaties, efficiency, buildings, facilities, transport links, accommodation, security and will have input from Members, former Members, the Administration, other staff, assistants and external interested parties."

To assist the Study Group in its deliberations, Mr McMillan-Scott asked me to produce this report. It is based on face-to-face (or in some cases telephone) interviews and/or meetings with 30 MEPs, assistants, EP secretariat officials, members of political group staff and member state representatives<sup>6</sup>, and conducted in Brussels and Strasbourg in November and December 2010. I also used email messages received subsequently, and desk research (using official documents and other publicly available information).

Most of those interviewed asked not to be quoted by name in this report. For officials this is understandable. As far as MEPs are concerned, the leaders of the two largest Groups, the EPP and the S&D, are Strasbourg partisans. Probably as a result, many MEPs are reluctant to take a position on the issue publicly. This silence is often mistaken for agreement with the existing situation. As this report shows, nothing could be further from the truth. There appears to be a code of silence on the issue, a veritable *omertà*, which needs to be broken if a proper debate is to take place.

As many of the individuals who volunteered to take part in the study were known or likely supporters of a single Seat of the Parliament in Brussels, I actively sought meetings with MEPs known to be advocates of Strasbourg as the Seat of Parliament. Unfortunately none responded to my request for an interview<sup>7</sup>. However, I took part in a meeting between Mr McMillan-Scott and the French Permanent Representative to the EU, who staunchly defended the current arrangement, and Mr McMillan-Scott met the Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg. I also attended a meeting with the Minister for the Brussels region, who outlined the European Commission's plans for significant new buildings in Brussels, the administrative - but not political - centre of the EU.

### ***Michiel van Hulst***

*Brussels/Strasbourg, February 2011*

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<sup>5</sup> Letter from Mr McMillan-Scott to Mr Buzek, 20 October 2010.

<sup>6</sup> From Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK.

<sup>7</sup> The mayor of Strasbourg, Roland Ries and Cathérine Trautmann MEP, who is also Strasbourg City Council member, did issue a press release on 29 October 2010 responding to the setting up of the Seat Study Group by Mr McMillan-Scott. In this press release they stated: "The announcement made to MEPs by Mr McMillan-Scott on Thursday 21 October brings up the "question of seats" or the "dual-seat" arrangement of the EP. The manner in which the British MEP talks of the issue is neither "neutral" nor "objective" to take up the terms of his statement. It is not, in any case, in line with the treaties between the Member States of the European Union".

## 2. HISTORY OF THE TWO-SEAT ARRANGEMENT

"When the Council of Europe, now consisting of 47 Member States, was created in 1949, the question arose as to which city would be best placed to accommodate this organization responsible for promoting European unity, democracy, human rights and political pluralism. Strasbourg was chosen for the reasons explained by Ernest Bevin, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs:

We were looking for a centre that could both be convenient for all European nations and come to symbolize European unity. Strasbourg was a natural choice. This great city had been witness to such breed of human stupidity that attempted to settle its affairs through war, cruelty, and sheer destruction."<sup>8</sup>

What the City of Strasbourg fails to mention on its website, however, is that in private, Bevin allegedly gave a completely different reason for locating the first major post-war European institution in the city: "Strasbourg? Perfect, no one will go there."<sup>9</sup> The issue of the Seat of the Institutions has continued to divide Europe ever since.

In his memoirs, Jean Monnet, who favoured grouping all Institutions in a single city as a precursor to a European 'federal district', recalls a discussion on the Seat of the Institutions at a meeting of foreign ministers of the six founding members of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952. He describes it as "a highly laughable display of veto power"<sup>10</sup>. France and Italy argued for Strasbourg, Belgium put forward Liège (for internal political reasons it couldn't be Brussels), and the Dutch backed The Hague. French foreign minister Robert Schuman suggested Saarbrücken as a compromise, but according to Monnet this did not go down well with the Germans, who were taken by surprise. Eventually, Luxembourg foreign minister Joseph Bech suggested his own capital city as an interim solution. This proposal was accepted with relief.

The Treaty of Rome, which created the European Economic Community (EEC), was signed in 1957 and entered into force in 1958. Article 216 of Treaty of Rome stipulates that "the seat of the institutions of the Community shall be determined by common accord of the Governments of the Member States."

But at their next conference on 1 July 1958, the foreign ministers once again failed to reach an agreement. It took another seven years for member states to return to the issue. They agreed on Luxembourg, Brussels and Strasbourg as "provisional places of work" of the Institutions. The limited nature of the agreement dated 8 April 1965 – recognising the status quo – is illustrated by its title: "Decision on the provisional location of certain institutions and departments of the Communities".

Between 1965 and 1992, Parliament's working arrangements were in constant flux. From 1967 to 1981 Parliament held plenary sessions in Luxembourg as well as in Strasbourg. But in 1981, fed up with member states' failure to reach an agreement on a single Seat, Parliament declared that in future all plenary sessions would be held in

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<sup>8</sup> Website of the City of Strasbourg, <http://www.strasbourg.eu/en/europe.html>

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Riot, with Sandrine Kauffer: *L'Europe, cette emmerdeuse*; quoted on [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_institutions\\_in\\_Strasbourg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_institutions_in_Strasbourg)

<sup>10</sup> Jean Monnet, *Mémoires*. Paris, Fayard, 1976, pp. 432-434. MvH translation.

Strasbourg, and all committee and political group meetings in Brussels<sup>11</sup>. It had earlier decided to scrap the Luxembourg plenary sessions from its 1981 calendar<sup>12</sup>. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) rejected a legal challenge to this decision by the Luxembourg government, but in 1984 it did block a subsequent attempt by Parliament to further reduce its presence in Luxembourg.

In 1985, Parliament voted to build in Brussels the key infrastructure which it had lacked there up to that point – a debating chamber for the whole Parliament to meet. In 1989 Parliament voted to start holding additional plenary sessions during the committee and political group weeks in Brussels<sup>13</sup>, the so-called mini-plenaries. In 1993 it moved into a new large, purpose-built complex on Rue Wiertz.

Despite the opening of a new Strasbourg building (which Parliament had been induced to agree to in return for being allowed to occupy the new premises in Brussels), things seemed to be going Brussels' way. But at the December 1992 Edinburgh European Council, chaired by British Prime Minister John Major, member states finally reached a decision on the location of the Seats of the institutions. With regard to the Parliament it was decided that:

"The European Parliament shall have its seat in Strasbourg where the twelve periods of monthly plenary sessions, including the budget session, shall be held. The periods of additional plenary sessions shall be held in Brussels. The Committees of the European Parliament shall meet in Brussels. The General Secretariat of the European Parliament and its departments shall remain in Luxembourg."<sup>14</sup>

According to former MEP Peter Price, the motivation for that UK diplomacy and the concession by other member states was that France had blocked the establishment of new EU bodies until Strasbourg was declared to be the Parliament's Seat. The European Environment Agency headed a growing list of bodies agreed in principle but which were unable to start work<sup>15</sup>.

In its post-Summit resolution, co-authored by Mr Price, Parliament responded furiously:

"The European Parliament (...)

24. Expresses its astonishment that the European Council has taken a decision purporting to settle in detail locations for all the European Parliament's various activities, without even consulting Parliament itself;

25. Declares that any decision which permanently splits the European Parliament's activities between three different Member States conflicts with the Treaties, notably Articles 5, 142 and 216 of the EEC Treaty, and is contrary to the inherent right of a

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<sup>11</sup> European Parliament Resolution on the seat of the institutions of the European Community and in particular of the European Parliament ("Zagari report", 7 July 1981), European Navigator.

<sup>12</sup> Written comments from Mr Peter Price, former MEP, 10 January 2011.

<sup>13</sup> European Parliament Resolution on the seat of the Institutions and the main place of work of the European Parliament ("Prag report", 18 January 1989), European Navigator.

<sup>14</sup> Decision taken by common agreement between the representatives of the governments of the Member States on the location of the seats of the institutions and of certain bodies and departments of the European Communities (12 December 1992), European Navigator.

<sup>15</sup> Written comments from Mr Peter Price, 10 January 2011.

Parliament elected by direct universal suffrage to determine its own working methods so as to carry out its tasks in the most effective manner;

26. Considers that the decision on its seat may not impinge on its powers to run its own affairs in accordance with the Treaties and the case law of the Court of Justice; does not therefore consider itself bound by measures which would be contrary to the Treaties;"<sup>16</sup>

Member states eventually responded, again under intense French pressure, by enshrining the Edinburgh agreement in a protocol to the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam.

In 1995 EP President Klaus Hänsch concluded an agreement with Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker on the EP's continued presence in the Grand Duchy. It was agreed that Parliament would preserve in Luxembourg until 2004:

- the permanent presence of 2.185 posts in Luxembourg; however Parliament could, subject to negotiation, reduce this number to 2000 if confronted with a compelling need to reduce this number;
- the translation service;
- the majority of Parliament's legal advisors;
- all staff members responsible for the organisation of the plenary sessions;
- all staff members of the Administration (the former DG 6) with the exception of ushers, drivers, technicians and interpreters;
- services charged with filing (archives) and studies (e.g. the STOA team);
- the Secretary General and unspecified number of the members of his cabinet.<sup>17</sup>

On 1 October 1997, the ECJ once again ruled on the Seat question, following a vote in Parliament to reduce the number of annual plenary sessions from 12 to 11 (in case C-345/95, French Republic v. European Parliament):

"The decision of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States on the location of the seats of the institutions and of certain bodies and departments of the European Communities, definitively locating the seat of the Parliament in Strasbourg, whilst maintaining several places of work for that institution, must be interpreted as defining the seat of the Parliament as the place where 12 ordinary plenary part-sessions must take place on a regular basis, including those during which the Parliament is to exercise the budgetary powers conferred upon it by the Treaty. Additional plenary part-sessions cannot therefore be scheduled for any other place of work unless the Parliament holds the 12 ordinary plenary part-sessions in Strasbourg, where it has its seat."<sup>18</sup>

If that was meant to be the end of the matter, inevitably it failed. In 2000, following a drive by the cross-party Campaign for Parliament Reform (CPR), MEPs voted to

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<sup>16</sup> European Parliament Resolution on the conclusions of the European Council meeting in Edinburgh on 11 and 12 December 1992 (16 December 1992), European Navigator.

<sup>17</sup> Responses by the Secretary-General to the 2009 discharge questionnaire, European Parliament, December 2010.

<sup>18</sup> [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga\\_doc?smartapi!celexplus!prod!CELEXnumdoc&lg=en&numdoc=61995J0345](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexplus!prod!CELEXnumdoc&lg=en&numdoc=61995J0345)

scrap Friday meetings in Strasbourg, which had become notorious for their very low attendance rates. Attempts in subsequent years by the pro-Strasbourg lobby to overturn this decision failed. However, efforts to cut back the total of number of plenary sessions held in Strasbourg also did not succeed, despite a vote in 2003 to reduce the number of plenary sessions from 11 to 10 in the 2004 election year<sup>19</sup>, a decision which was subsequently reversed.

On 13 April 2000 Parliament adopted, by a large majority (401 votes to 77), a resolution containing proposals for that year's Intergovernmental Conference, which was to result in the Treaty of Nice. One notable proposal was that the Parliament should be allowed to "decide by an absolute majority of its members, on the location of its seat and of all its meetings"<sup>20</sup>. Not surprisingly, given that the Intergovernmental Conference was concluded under French Presidency, the proposal was not taken up by member states. But it did demonstrate strong support within the Parliament for a right to 'self-determination' on the Seat question.

In late 2000 the Luxembourg government agreed to a request from EP President Fontaine for a further transfer of Secretariat posts to Brussels. The 1996 Juncker/Hänsch agreement was modified to state that in future half of Parliament's staff (excluding political group and national information offices staff) would remain assigned to Luxembourg, and that at least 2060 staff members would remain assigned to Luxembourg beyond 2004<sup>21</sup>.

Advocates of a single Seat for the Parliament in Brussels missed probably their greatest opportunity when the Convention on the Future of Europe, which drafted the ill-fated European Constitution (which subsequently formed the basis for the Treaty of Lisbon), failed to take up an amendment put forward by British Liberal Democrat MEP Andrew Duff and others in 2003 which proposed to include the following text in the Constitution:

"3. Each institution shall act within the limits of the powers conferred on it in the Constitution and be responsible for their own working arrangements, in conformity with the procedures and conditions laid down. The institutions may conclude interinstitutional agreements.

4. The seat of the institutions, bodies and agencies of the Union shall be determined by the Council, acting by qualified majority, with the assent of the EP."

The demise of the Duff amendment did not deter Cecilia Malmström, a Swedish Liberal MEP and a founding member of the Campaign for Parliament Reform (CPR), who went on to become Sweden's Europe Minister and is now a Member of the European Commission. In May 2006 she launched an online petition for a single seat on the website [www.oneseat.eu](http://www.oneseat.eu). The petition was designed to capitalise on an article in the proposed EU Constitution which would allow 1 million European citizens to

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<sup>19</sup> President Cox said following the vote that the deletion of the part-session would have to be referred to the Conference of Presidents since Parliament could not ignore its constitutional obligations. Minutes of proceedings, European Parliament, 9 April 2003.

<sup>20</sup> EP resolution containing the EP's proposals for the Intergovernmental Conference, 13 April 2000, [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu).

<sup>21</sup> Responses by the Secretary-General to the 2009 discharge questionnaire, European Parliament, December 2010.

place an issue on the Commission's policy agenda, the so-called 'citizens' initiative'. Malmström explained her initiative as follows:

"At every school visit I have made during the last seven years, there has been one question coming back – why does the European Parliament commute between Brussels and Strasbourg every month? My European colleagues in the parliament have the same experience. Everybody, everywhere, no matter how little they know about the European Union and its institutions, they know about the commuting. They have all seen the photographs of the dozens of lorries filled with boxes of paper driving between the two cities. It is a question that has disgraced the European Parliament for a long time, it gives hard working politicians a ridiculous image and it brings huge expenses to the taxpayers. We are the only parliament in the world that has no say over where it sits as this is decided by the member states and written in the Treaties."<sup>22</sup>

The One Seat online petition was highly successful: on Monday 18 September 2006 Malmström announced that the petition had gathered over 1 million signatures. By December 2010, a further 0,25 million signatures had been added. By contrast, a competing online petition calling for a single Seat for the Parliament in Strasbourg, [www.one-city.eu](http://www.one-city.eu), had gathered just over 5000 signatures.

Commissioner Wallström agreed with the One Seat petitioners, saying in interview: "Something that was once a very positive symbol of the European Union reuniting France and Germany has now become a negative symbol – of wasting money, bureaucracy and the insanity of the Brussels institutions"<sup>23</sup>. But with the Union in post-referendum institutional limbo, the Commission was unable to act on the petitioners' demands.

Despite the lack of institutional progress the campaign for a single Seat continued. In April 2007 two Green MEPs from the UK, Jean Lambert and Caroline Lucas, published a report by independent experts on the environmental impact of the Parliament's two-seat arrangement<sup>24</sup>. And in September 2008 the Parliament held its first-ever full plenary sessions in Brussels, following the collapse of the ceiling of the Strasbourg plenary chamber. The collapse prompted the Campaign for Parliament Reform, led by Alexander Alvaro MEP, a German Liberal, to revive the One Seat campaign. MEPs were symbolically given hard hats to wear to protect them against the alleged dangers of the Strasbourg building. According to the Secretary-General, the move of two part-sessions from Strasbourg to Brussels led to net savings of €1.731.086<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Cecilia Malmström, *Why the One Seat Campaign?*, [www.oneseat.eu](http://www.oneseat.eu)

<sup>23</sup> *From words to actions*. Interview with European Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström in E-Sharp magazine, September-October 2006.

<sup>24</sup> *EP: a study of the environmental costs of the EP two-seat operation*, Eco-Logica Ltd., Lancaster, November 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Responses by the Secretary-General to the 2009 discharge questionnaire, European Parliament, December 2010.

### **3. IMPACT OF THE TWO-SEAT ARRANGEMENT**

The EP's *de facto* two-seat, three working places arrangement has important consequences for the way it operates and the way it is perceived. This chapter aims to give an overview of the most significant issues, as well as how they impact the people who work in, around and with the Parliament.

#### **Parliament's ability to exercise its duties under the Treaty**

Under the EU Treaty, the EP exercises legislative and budgetary functions jointly with the Council, as well as functions of political control and consultation, primarily vis-à-vis the Commission. Yet unlike the Council and the Commission, the Parliament does not have its official Seat in Brussels but in Strasbourg and spends one week per month away from the other Institutions.

The European Commission holds its weekly meeting in Strasbourg when the Parliament holds its plenary session there, which means that Commissioners are accessible to MEPs. But Commissioners usually stay in Strasbourg for only 24- 36 hours and most of their officials don't leave Brussels, thus limiting the amount of work that can be done and forcing Parliament to plan its activities further ahead than it would normally do, and creating difficulties when there is a crisis or Commissioners have scheduling conflicts.

Similarly, the Council is represented in Strasbourg by the Presidency, but most member state officials - the desk officers who work with their colleagues in the Parliament on legislative dossiers - don't travel to Strasbourg on a monthly basis. Meanwhile, Council meetings in Brussels (and in June and October, Luxembourg) carry on as usual at all levels. It also makes it more difficult to organise legislative meetings between the two Institutions, of which there will only be more following the entry into effect of the Lisbon Treaty. One experienced MEP assistant said: "Conciliation is much easier to organise in Brussels, where the Commission and Council are based. It's more difficult in Strasbourg"<sup>26</sup>.

Proponents of the split-site arrangement often argue that the advent of the internet and improved transport links have made it easier and less expensive than in the past to have three places of work. But one senior Secretariat official said:

"It's not about the money. It's about the principle. A parliament belongs with the other institutions: the Commission, the Council, the Parliament. The power is in Brussels, that's where you want to be. Technology has made it easier to be in Strasbourg. But the essence is power."<sup>27</sup>

In a 2002 note for the Bureau on the cost of maintaining three places of work, the then Secretary-General, Julian Priestley wrote:

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with an Italian assistant, 7 December 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with a senior EP Secretariat official, 24 November 2010.

"(...) the division which exists between the three places of work weakens the cohesion of the institution. Serious problems arise therefrom with regard to the planning of the institution's activities."<sup>28</sup>

Lousewies van der Laan, a former MEP who authored a paper in 2003 on strengthening the Parliament, agrees and says that the Council uses 'Strasbourg' as an excuse not to attend debates:

"Politically, the EP's task is to exercise democratic control over the Council and the Commission. Both these institutions are based in Brussels. How can the EP do its job when the Parliament's seat is at times far removed from the institutions it is supposed to control? Ministers from the Council presidency and [Javier] Solana have used Strasbourg's bad plane connections as an excuse not to attend debates. Journalists are loath to spend their limited budgets on over-priced hotels when they have an apartment in Brussels. So MEPs have their debates in a largely empty chamber with busloads of senior citizens as the main spectators."<sup>29</sup>

Paradoxically, the controversy over the Seat issue has meant that Parliament has so far been unable to agree on an effective mechanism to hold the Commission to account in Brussels. While many MEPs would like to organise a weekly mini-plenary in Brussels to enable the Commission to report back to Parliament on the decisions taken at that week's College meeting, supporters of Strasbourg are worried that this could lead to further moves towards a single Seat in Brussels. Whether these fears are justified or not - and they may well be - they do result in Parliament's effectiveness and credibility as a whole being undermined.

### Parliament's public image

MEPs have long been conscious of the impact the constant travel between different working places has on the Parliament's image. In a resolution adopted on 7 July 1981 Parliament listed its concerns and called for a single Seat:

"The European Parliament,

(...)

pointing out that this dispersal of its places of work involves an enormous and growing burden on the budget of the European Parliament which it is becoming increasingly difficult to explain or justify to Community taxpayers,

consequently recognizing the need for a single working place,

(...)

whereas direct elections gave the European Parliament and its members greater responsibility towards public opinion, of which it is the mouthpiece and representative,

recognizing the difficulty of directly elected members to explain to the European electorate the work and functions of the European Community and in particular of the

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<sup>28</sup> Note D/24355 from the Secretary-General of the EP to Members of the Bureau, PE 320.860/BUR./fin., 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Lousewies van der Laan, *The case for a stronger EP*, pp. 29-30.

European Parliament without being able to appeal to the imagination of the electorate by having an identifiable building for the Parliament,

(...)

2. Believes it is essential to concentrate its work in one place;"<sup>30</sup>

Eight years later, in 1989, Parliament adopted a resolution stating that "in the absence of a single set of buildings in a single centre symbolizing democratic control and popular representation at European Community level, the European electorate finds it difficult to identify with the EP"<sup>31</sup>.

That is also the view of many of today's MEPs. According to Chris Davies MEP, a British Liberal and a veteran campaigner for reform:

"It's a long, weeping sore. I resent the extra cost, but it also weakens the Parliament. It makes us a source of ridicule. Not just with our electorate, but also with others, such as Commissioners who regularly have to travel to Strasbourg. Public opinion is universally hostile to two seats. You can explain it from the historical point of view, but that's Europe in 1945, not 2010."<sup>32</sup>

Another MEP said:

"Strasbourg was a symbol of reconciliation, now it's a symbol of waste. In the UK, anyone who wants to attack the Parliament uses the two seats as an example. It's ridiculous, especially at a time of austerity. It's very bad for the reputation of the Parliament, and bad for the reputation of the EU"<sup>33</sup>.

A third MEP agreed:

"When you're on the plane, you talk to people, and the first thing they say is: oh yes, you're the people that cost us a lot of money! You can't get past that initial perception. It's like an albatross hanging around our neck."<sup>34</sup>

This view is not restricted to MEPs from North-West Europe, as is often assumed. One German MEP said:

"I'm a member of the Friends of Strasbourg group. I'm very committed to Franco-German friendship. But even I can't explain at home why we have two seats. As far as the symbolism is concerned: nobody in Strasbourg speaks German anymore! Even Strasbourg cannot achieve for the French and the Germans what they themselves don't want to do. If you need Strasbourg for Franco-German reconciliation, the cause is lost."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> EP Resolution on the seat of the institutions of the European Community and in particular of the EP ("Zagari report", 7 July 1981), European Navigator.

<sup>31</sup> EP Resolution on the seat of the Institutions and the main place of work of the EP ("Prag report", 18 January 1989), European Navigator.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Chris Davies MEP, 1 December 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with a British MEP, 2 December 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with a senior MEP, 1 December 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with a German MEP, 1 December 2010.

All of those interviewed recognised the value of Strasbourg as a symbol of Franco-German reconciliation, but most felt the symbolism had lost much of its importance in post-1989 Europe, and that other concerns now needed to be addressed.

A political group official responsible for media relations shared the MEPs' concern: "It's evident that the move is a waste of time, energy and money for the people working here. It's also a problem for the Parliament's image"<sup>36</sup>.

An official in the Parliament's secretariat said: "My son was taught at school that Strasbourg is the Seat of Parliament and asks me why I'm working in Brussels!"<sup>37</sup>

Another official wrote in an email message:

"I am not an MEP, only a Parliament official, but I have been travelling to Strasbourg for eight years now. And I just wanted to say that any effort to stop this will be more than welcome from the part of many, many fonctionnaires like me. As a young mother of two kids, as well as a committed fonctionnaire, I don't need further reasons to support (...) attempts to bring some more rationality to this House and stop the Strasbourg show. Yes I do like the city of Strasbourg. But can you imagine the face of my friends back at home when I try to explain them that due to a very old agreement signed after the Second World War I now have two offices, one of which I only use four days a month, and all the travel expenses this entails for the whole House?"<sup>38</sup>

What is clear is that concern about the negative impact of the two-seat arrangement on Parliament's image is not new, nor is it restricted to a Eurosceptic fringe. Its impact is greatest in countries where some media actively pursue the issue, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, the Nordic countries and the UK, but it is increasingly felt in other member states, too.

### The work of MEPs

The MEPs interviewed for this report expressed remarkably similar views on the two-seat arrangement. Most said that while Strasbourg can be useful for networking and is often good fun socially, they resent the hassle that's involved, as well as the additional costs. According to Alexander Alvaro, it's mainly about an MEP's ability to work and live normally:

"It's a week condensed in three working days. Of course you can organise your work, there's phone and email. But Strasbourg is more hectic, more stressful, people are always jumping from meeting to meeting. There's no room for any private thoughts, private space. You're in a hotel. It feels wrong in terms of working."<sup>39</sup>

This was echoed by Chris Davies:

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with a political group official responsible for media relations, 24 November 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 30 November 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Email message from a EP Secretariat official, 14 January 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Alexander Alvaro MEP, 7 December 2010.

"I prefer Brussels, but I don't dislike Strasbourg. Brussels feels more like home, but there's a better atmosphere in Strasbourg chamber. The Strasbourg week is a very different week agenda-wise, and access to Commissioners is easy because of their Tuesday college meetings there. We always enjoy Strasbourg - but after 12 years the novelty wears off."<sup>40</sup>

Bart Staes, a Belgian Greens/EFA MEP who is Vice-Chair of the Budgetary Control Committee and was the rapporteur for the discharge of the Parliament's 2008 budget, said he was principally concerned about costs:

"It's useful, Strasbourg. You can really focus for a week, and network with colleagues. But it's indefensible. The fact that the building is empty for three weeks, all the shifting of boxes. Especially for Belgian MEPs it can be useful to spend a week away from their constituency. But it doesn't weigh up against the costs."<sup>41</sup>

Another MEP also subscribed this view:

"It doesn't impact on my work so much. You try to avoid extra costs as much as you can. But the EP should regroup as much as possible. Probably in Brussels if there was a choice. There will always be travel to the EU institutions, but it should be reduced."<sup>42</sup>

In the interviews conducted for this report not a single MEP defended the two-seat arrangement, and most complained (often bitterly) about it. All were in favour of a single Seat in Brussels, with varying degrees of conviction. Nevertheless, one senior MEP confessed: "Perversely, I'd probably miss it if we weren't going! Strasbourg has something Brussels doesn't"<sup>43</sup>. Others reported similar feelings.

### **The work of MEP assistants**

Every month, most MEPs take one assistant with them to Strasbourg. Most are based in Brussels. The assistants interviewed for this report were even more outspoken in their opposition to the two-seat arrangement than Members. One Finnish assistant explained: "The continuous travelling to Strasbourg is neither efficient nor climate friendly"<sup>44</sup>. A Franco-British assistant said: "I hate it. It's tiring and pointless. I enjoy it when I'm there, but the move is ridiculous. It's a hassle"<sup>45</sup>.

One long-serving Italian assistant says the fun of Strasbourg quickly wears off:

"I've worked in the Parliament for a very long time. I've been to every Strasbourg session, except twice, when I was sick. It's a waste of time, energy and money. It's now easier compared to the past, thanks to the computer. But it's still absurd. Most of my colleagues think the same way. In the beginning people think it's nice, but it wears off. In Brussels you have everything under control, whereas Strasbourg is a form of stress. You have to pack, travel, go to your hotel, and then to the Parliament

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Chris Davies MEP, 1 December 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Bart Staes MEP, 23 November 2010

<sup>42</sup> Interview with an Austrian MEP, 24 November 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with a senior MEP, 1 December 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Written comments from a Finnish MEP assistant, 26 November 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with a Franco-British MEP assistant, 1 December 2010.

where it's always a rush, with everything concentrated in two full and two half days; you have to reconnect"<sup>46</sup>.

A Belgian assistant sees a positive aspect to Strasbourg, but mostly negatives:

"On the positive side, there's a different atmosphere compared to Brussels. In Brussels you're more focused on work. But that's the only positive. On the negative side, it's a waste of time. Even with the fast train it still takes four hours to get to Strasbourg. Working days are longer but you get less done. You always forget to bring some documents from Brussels. And it's a security risk: everyone on one train, on one plane going to Strasbourg. A building that is empty for three weeks every month and needs starting up again"<sup>47</sup>.

According to the same assistant, going to Strasbourg is partly about status: "It creates a false sense of self-importance. If you don't send one of your team to Strasbourg, you obviously don't count for much in the hierarchy"<sup>48</sup>.

### **The work of Parliament's Secretariat**

A large number of Secretariat and political group staff travel to Strasbourg every month. According to the note prepared by the Secretary-General for the Bureau in 2002:

"When a part-session is held in Strasbourg, 1 220 officials and other servants of Parliament and of the political groups, as well as freelance interpreters, travel from Brussels to Strasbourg, as do another 525 from Luxembourg to Strasbourg. On average, 150 officials travel each month from Luxembourg to Strasbourg to serve the parliamentary bodies meeting in Brussels. In the week when an additional part-session is held as well, that number increases to 290.

On average, there are 540 missions each month between Brussels and Luxembourg and 140 between Strasbourg and Brussels or Luxembourg. They are not connected with parliamentary meetings; they involve coordination of services or work to be carried out locally."<sup>49</sup>

In 2009, the number of missions between Brussels and Strasbourg had increased to 587 per month<sup>50</sup>

Of the officials interviewed for this report, one gave a resounding thumbs-up to being in Strasbourg:

"Most people like Strasbourg. In Strasbourg everyone is in the same boat, contacts are better and more efficient. It's easier for me to see my own colleagues in Strasbourg than it is in Brussels. There are disadvantages, but you see advantages too. Strasbourg has done everything to make MEPs feel at home. In Brussels you don't get

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with an Italian MEP assistant, 7 December 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with a Belgian MEP assistant, 24 November 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with a Belgian MEP assistant, 24 November 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Note D/24355 from the Secretary-General of the EP to Members of the Bureau, PE 320.860/BUR./fin., 2002.

<sup>50</sup> Responses by the Secretary-General to the discharge questionnaire 2009, European Parliament, December 2010.

things like free opera tickets. In Brussels not enough thinking has gone into the buildings. It's just not attractive! But Brussels is getting better, and gradually everything is shifting there. You don't have to do anything to make that happen. The new visitors' centre is a good example"<sup>51</sup>.

Another official who liked being in Strasbourg did not think the cost could be justified, however:

"Is going to Strasbourg effective? Yes. It's very good for networking and socialising, especially for officials. In Brussels everybody is always in a rush. Is it efficient? No. I don't know how the Parliament can afford it"<sup>52</sup>.

An official who had just been to Strasbourg for the first time said: "I moved all my files for just one meeting. It's a fun experience, but you wonder why we do it."<sup>53</sup>

A senior official with many trips to Strasbourg under his belt also said the monthly move affects productivity:

"I'm significantly less effective here. It doesn't matter where the Parliament meets, it's about making sure that you're all in the same place. But it costs a lot of time and money. The staff lose a lot of time travelling. There are more people in Strasbourg than strictly necessary. Video-conferencing is not a satisfactory alternative, you need to see each other in person. There is no half-way house. You don't send someone just for a day. The distance is too great, the transportation options are too limited. The computer network is much slower. You work with two or three people in one office. Some people have to sleep on a boat. The distance between buildings is huge. I can easily spend half an hour going from one meeting to the next!"<sup>54</sup>.

Another official said the distance makes it harder to organise work efficiently:

"There's conspicuous waste – but there's a lot of hidden waste as well. You can't speak to people while you're travelling. It's harder to get hold of people in Strasbourg, there's a lot of competing meetings taking place. And many of our counterparts are in Brussels. One Brussels-based colleague wanted to meet tomorrow before heading out on a foreign mission – but as I'm in Strasbourg we can't. So we'll do our business by phone and email instead"<sup>55</sup>.

This was echoed by an official who said in an email that the distance between Brussels and Strasbourg made it harder to provide a good service to Members:

"I am an official here at the EP, and I know most - if not all - of my colleagues support the idea of a single seat. Our service, the Library, produces Briefings and provides other information resources for individual MEPs. But the physical distance between our staff and the Strasbourg offices makes it harder to maintain the direct contact with MEPs which is so vital a part of providing a quality service (...)"<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 23 November 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 7 December 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 30 November 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with a senior EP Secretariat official, 24 November 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 22 November 2010.

<sup>56</sup> Email message from a EP Secretariat official, 14 January 2011.

One official noted the positive impact on staff based in Luxembourg: "For Luxembourg staff, it's often the only contact they get with the Institution."<sup>57</sup>

The Parliament's Staff Committee doesn't have a formal position on where the Parliament should meet. But Tom Morgan, who is a member of the Staff Committee on behalf of the SGPOE trade union, said, speaking in a personal capacity:

"A single seat is common sense. Having to move the Parliament costs a [lot of money](#), [lots of CO<sub>2</sub>](#) emissions, it takes people away from their place of work, their homes and families. An online poll of staff showed a large majority in favour of a single seat"<sup>58</sup>.

A survey of EP staff conducted in 2005 showed that 72% favoured a single Seat in Brussels<sup>59</sup>.

### Third parties

For MEPs, assistants and Parliament staff, the travel between home and/or the Parliament's places of work is a normal part of their work. But there are many others who travel to Strasbourg every month, including Council and Commission representatives, lobbyists and journalists. Many say they wouldn't mind so much if only the travel connections were better, accommodation was cheaper and more available, and there were adequate office facilities in the Parliament building.

One political group official responsible for media relations is concerned about the impact this is having on the ability of journalists to cover Parliament's proceedings:

"Journalists don't come to Strasbourg anymore. The correspondents from [my country] sent a letter to Members to ask them to organise their press meetings in Brussels, not Strasbourg. There are Commission, Council and Parliament meetings taking place at the same time in different places - Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg - and there's only one correspondent to cover them. In 2003 ten correspondents came here, now it's one or two. Often it's only the ones whose trip is paid for by the Parliament's information office. Live streams reduce the need to be in Strasbourg, but there's also budgetary constraints."<sup>60</sup>

The official said journalists invited by Parliament's national information offices to come to Strasbourg receive a daily allowance of €180, plus travel costs. This guarantees that at least one or two journalists from each country make the trip, in practice mostly from regional media. Most national and Brussels-based journalists stay away.

### Costs and efficiency

The EP has three places of work: Strasbourg, where the 12 monthly plenary sessions are held; Brussels, where committees and political groups meet, and Luxembourg, where (half of) the secretariat is based.

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 24 November 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Tom Morgan, 23 November 2010.

<sup>59</sup> EP NewsHound, issue 52, 8 March 2005.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with a political group official responsible for media relations, 24 November 2010.

The Strasbourg buildings stand empty for most of the year. While the cost of MEPs travelling from their home to Strasbourg instead of Brussels is broadly the same, there are additional costs for Brussels-based EP officials, interpreters and assistants (most of whom also receive some form of daily allowance on top of their regular salaries) as well as for 'third parties' such as Commission and Council officials, lobbyists and the media. These include travel costs, travel time, environmental impact, accommodation, childcare provision, productivity loss.

As early as 1981, the Parliament adopted a resolution pointing out that "this dispersal of its places of work involves an enormous and growing burden on the budget of the EP which it is becoming increasingly more difficult to explain or justify to Community taxpayers"<sup>61</sup>.

In his 2002 note on the cost of maintaining three places of work, Parliament's Secretary-General Priestley concluded:

"(...) the annual cost of the geographical dispersion may be estimated as follows:

		EUR
Infrastructure costs	- premises	78 million
	- IT and other equipment	42 million
Staff costs	- supernumerary staff	22 million
	- mission expenses	18 million
Sundry operating costs		9 million
	TOTAL	169 million

After enlargement, that figure might rise to EUR 203 million.

Any concentration of activities in one place of work would entail one-off infrastructure and staff removal costs. However, those costs would probably be offset by Parliament's vacating the larger premises currently occupied. Recurring costs might also arise. They would vary considerably depending on the country selected."<sup>62</sup>

In his report, the Secretary-General noted that a total of 257 staff posts could be abolished if Parliament had just one place of work, and that if working time lost because of travel was taken into account a further 60 posts could be abolished.

Dutch Liberal Jan Mulder MEP, a veteran Budget Committee member and former Quaestor said: "It's above all a waste of money. I don't see the symbolic value any longer. Brussels is the most logical place for the Seat due to the other Institutions being there"<sup>63</sup>. An Austrian MEP agreed: "It's a huge sum of money that's literally thrown in the air"<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> EP Resolution on the seat of the institutions of the European Community and in particular of the EP ("Zagari report", 7 July 1981), European Navigator.

<sup>62</sup> Note D/24355 from the Secretary-General of the EP to Members of the Bureau, PE 320.860/BUR./fin., 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Jan Mulder MEP, 23 November 2010.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with an Austrian MEP, 24 November 2010.

But one EP Secretariat official who makes the monthly journey felt the criticism was overblown: "The costs of going to Strasbourg aren't excessive. The buildings have been purchased. The costs mainly relate to the monthly move."<sup>65</sup>.

In Brussels the EP owns a complex of buildings with 4.719 offices close to the EU Commission and Council in which all MEPs and their assistants have separate offices. There also are all the officials dealing with committees and the day-to-day work of the EP. Representatives of the national parliaments of the EU are also housed there. In Strasbourg, this complex is repeated on a smaller scale (2.625 – largely shared - offices) for monthly four-day 'plenary' sessions with shared offices. In Luxembourg, another group of buildings (2.779 offices) is owned and currently an €800 million development is under way to create a single centre for the largely administrative and translation staff.

In 2006 the Parliament's Bureau voted to buy the buildings in Strasbourg it did not yet own<sup>66</sup>. The price had been lowered after the revelation that the City of Strasbourg had until then been overcharging the EP on its rent by up to €2,7 million per year.<sup>67</sup> The combined cost to the Parliament of buying the Louise Weiss (LOW), Winston Churchill (WIC) and Salvador de Madariaga (SDM) buildings in Strasbourg was approximately €551 million. Despite this hefty sum there are still serious problems with the buildings. In 2008 the ceiling of the Strasbourg hemicycle collapsed, forcing Parliament to seek temporary refuge in Brussels. The ceiling cost €8,8 million to replace. An additional €330.000 was spent on checking the Strasbourg buildings for asbestos and to remove any residue.<sup>68</sup> In September 2010 it was announced that the EU's anti-fraud office OLAF agreed to look again at claims of irregularities in the financing of the EP's buildings.<sup>69</sup>

According to the 2002 Priestley note, having a single place of work would have a significant impact on Parliament's accommodation needs, rendering redundant:

- one Chamber
- 21 large conference rooms (seating between 100 and 350 persons) and 13 small conference rooms (seating between 20 and 60 persons) with interpreters' booths and 13 small conference rooms without interpreters' booths
- 2 650 offices
- the corresponding technical areas and general amenities

with a total surface area of about 300.000 m<sup>2</sup>.

In Parliament's 2006 budget estimates (drawn up in 2005), the potential annual savings involved in having a single place of work were estimated by Parliament's

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 23 November 2010.

<sup>66</sup> Mr McMillan-Scott says that his was the only vote against.

<sup>67</sup> <http://euobserver.com/?aid=21603>

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/where-the-money-goes/67046.aspx>

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.theparliament.com/latest-news/article/newsarticle/olaf-reopens-case-of-financing-of-parliaments-buildings/>

administration to be close to €204 million. In 2010 the estimate was closer to €157 million<sup>70</sup> - excluding depreciation costs for the Strasbourg buildings, estimated at €23 million per annum<sup>71</sup>, which makes a total of €180 million. The reduction in the potential annual savings estimate from €204 to €180 million was primarily due to efficiency savings resulting from information technology as well as lower rental costs following the purchase of the Strasbourg buildings<sup>72</sup>.

### Environment

The geographical dispersion of the EP's activities has a big impact on the environment. In 2007 UK Green MEPs Caroline Lucas and Jean Lambert commissioned an independent study on the environmental impact of the EP's two-seat operation. The most recent version of the report concluded that:

"On uniformly conservative assumptions, the Strasbourg operation imposes a CO<sub>2</sub> burden that is at the very least 18.884,5 tonnes greater (and probably much more) than if the sole seat was Brussels. A decision to adopt a one-seat mode of operation where that seat is Brussels would "save" almost 19.000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> each year."<sup>73</sup>

An Austrian MEP said: "The CO<sub>2</sub> footprint is just way too much"<sup>74</sup>. Another one said: "The EU is trying to set the lead in the world on the CO<sub>2</sub> issue, and yet we trek between two seats. You couldn't make it up"<sup>75</sup>.

Chris Davies, who is the Liberal coordinator on the Parliament's Environment Committee, says Parliament should lead by example:

"We don't take the environment seriously. Parliament should set a standard of best practice for other bodies. If we take our e-mass obligations seriously, we'd reduce our emissions. We'd have longer weeks and less of them"<sup>76</sup>.

On its website, Parliament says it is committed to cutting its own CO<sub>2</sub> emissions:

#### **"Cutting Parliament's carbon footprint"**

A plan to reduce Parliament's carbon "footprint" by 30% by 2020 was approved by the Bureau in October 2008. Parliament cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 17% when it switched to all "green electricity" in 2008, and it is the only EU institution to have been awarded Environmental Management Scheme (EMAS) certificates for promoting efficient energy, water and paper usage at all its places of work (Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg). Parliament has over one million square metres of buildings to ventilate, heat and maintain. Its energy consumption breaks down as follows: energy and natural gas (32%), passenger transport (28%) equipment and

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<sup>70</sup> 2010 European Parliament budget estimates.

<sup>71</sup> Responses by the Secretary-General to the 2009 discharge questionnaire, European Parliament, December 2010.

<sup>72</sup> Source: a senior EP official.

<sup>73</sup> *EP two-seat operation: Environmental costs, transport and energy*, Professor John Whitelegg, Lancaster, November 2007.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with an Austrian MEP, 24 November 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with a British MEP, 2 December 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Chris Davies MEP, 1 December 2010.

services (20%), fixed assets such as buildings and IT hardware (19%) and cooling (1%).

### **Environment-friendly buildings**

Parliament has recently opened two buildings in Brussels - the Willy Brandt and József Antall buildings, which have a 145.000 litre basin that catches rainwater for flushing toilets. They also have eight rotating solar panels to heat water and offices and detectors that automatically switch off lights, heating and ventilation when an office is empty".<sup>77</sup>

But it's clear from the report by Professor Whitelegg that Parliament would reduce its emission much more significantly if it decided to hold plenary sessions only in one place.

### **Transportation**

When discussing the Parliament's two-seat arrangement, the issue MEPs, assistants, officials and others usually mention first is the lack of adequate travel connections to Strasbourg. Chris Davies said: "My heart sinks each time I think about Strasbourg. On a good day, I can be there in six hours, on a bad day in eight. That's not as bad as for some. It's a chore. Two hours thirty-five minutes is my record for Brussels! Four hours is more normal"<sup>78</sup>.

The regular international train from Brussels to Strasbourg via Luxembourg takes six hours. There is a direct Thalys train from Brussels during Strasbourg plenary weeks, but only on Monday and Thursday, and tickets for this are not sold commercially. On 14 December 2010 the Parliament's travel office sent a message to MEPs and staff warning of a massive shortage of seats:

"The Thalys train operating between Brussels and Strasbourg each Monday and Thursday of the plenary session provides 740 seats. During the last months the BCD travel agency received far more requests for reservation than there were seats available: for the December session, for instance, more than 1.300 requests were received. It is obvious that not all interested persons can obtain a seat on the train.

The travel agency has the obligation to apply the criterion: "First come, first served". This criterion has recently been confirmed by the Quaestors

Persons wanting to have a seat on the Thalys should not wait for the monthly communication stipulating that the travel agency will start to distribute the tickets. The validation of the mission orders for staff members and parliamentary assistants can be done before this monthly communication. All requests are filed according to the date of their arrival at the agency and will be dealt with in that order.

The travel office is looking for solutions to satisfy all customers. No railway company is currently able to provide a supplementary train. As a result, the travel agency will, if necessary, charter an extra plane on Mondays."

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<sup>77</sup> *Frequently Asked Questions about MEPs and the EP*, [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu)

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Chris Davies MEP, 1 December 2010.

There are direct flights to Strasbourg from only six of the 27 European capitals: Brussels, Copenhagen, Lisbon, Madrid, Paris and Prague<sup>79</sup> (see Annex 2). The Parliament also charters a flight from Brussels for its staff. Many MEPs and others who do not come from Brussels face a three-leg journey: first from their home to the capital of their country, then on to Paris or another intermediate airport, and finally to Strasbourg. One senior MEP said: "On a personal level, it's very frustrating. I used to have to take two flights to Strasbourg. They've just changed the timetable. I now have to get three flights! It's physically stupid to work like that"<sup>80</sup>. An Italian MEP assistant agreed:

"Since the French Presidency it's easier with the TGV. But it's very difficult to leave in the middle of the week. The Greeks are very upset that on Thursday there's only one flight to Athens, a charter. Otherwise they have to go through Paris. For Italians it's the same if you're not from Rome. From Milan it's faster to go to Strasbourg by car!"<sup>81</sup>

Many MEPs fly to larger airports nearby, mostly Frankfurt, and take a car, train or a bus to Strasbourg. Others travel by car.

According to one British MEP:

"In a normal week, I can get from my home to Brussels in about three-and-a-half to four hours. That depends on things like delays. Strasbourg is at least nine hours, and that's if everything goes well. I've tried flying twice, both times it went wrong and I missed my connection. Sometimes it takes longer to fly than it does to travel by train. I've given up. I only take the train now. Connections with Strasbourg are abysmal. That's because there's no commercial sense in flying to Strasbourg."<sup>82</sup>

One Austrian MEP however said travel was not an issue: "Travelling is not a problem for me, the airport and the train are ok. It's the expense I'm concerned about."<sup>83</sup>

The French government and Strasbourg authorities often claim that transport links have improved. But Dutch veteran Jan Mulder said: "Nothing has changed since 1994"<sup>84</sup>. A secretariat official agreed: "The direct TGV has improved the drudgery of going down to Strasbourg. But anecdotal evidence suggests that for many people the travel experience has gotten worse"<sup>85</sup>.

A non-scientific check carried out for the purposes of this report revealed that for a randomly selected capital, Warsaw, links to Brussels during a mixed political group/committee week (the week of 10 January 2011) are both more convenient and cheaper than for the plenary week in Strasbourg that follows (the week of 17 January 2011). This check was carried out in the week of 6 December, i.e. more than a month before the travel dates in question.

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<sup>79</sup> <http://www.strasbourg.aeroport.fr/index.php/accueil?lang=E>

<sup>80</sup> Interview with a senior MEP, 1 December 2010.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with an Italian MEP assistant, 7 December 2010.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with a British MEP, 2 December 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with an Austrian MEP, 24 November 2010.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Jan Mulder MEP, 23 November 2010.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with a EP secretariat official, 1 December 2010.

An MEP travelling from Warsaw to Brussels on Monday 10 January, and returning home on Thursday 13 January, can take a LOT flight that takes 2 hours 20 minutes from Warsaw to Brussels, and 2 hours 5 minutes from Brussels to Warsaw. The cost of a business class ticket (which is what the EP reimburses) is €945,09. Alternatively the MEP can fly on Swiss via Zurich for the lesser amount of €732,93. That journey would take 4 hours 15 minutes to Brussels, and 4 hours 10 minutes back to Warsaw.

Going to Strasbourg the week after, the best connection available is on Air France via Paris, which takes 6 hours and 55 minutes there and 6 hours 45 minutes back, at a cost of €1.097,97 in business class. Another factor is that transiting through Paris CDG now means a 2 km bus journey to its new regional terminal, which caters for small inter-city aircraft. This backs up anecdotal evidence from many Members that travel to Brussels is both more convenient and cheaper than travel to Strasbourg.

In addition to the difficult and expensive connections, there are often issues with the airport, which is less well equipped than larger international airports to stay open during bad weather conditions. Alexander Alvaro commented: "Strasbourg's airport is everything but international. We're supposed to be made to feel welcome in Strasbourg, but it doesn't feel like that. A minimum requirement is good transport links"<sup>86</sup>.

### Accommodation

Accommodation similarly is considered a big problem. Most Strasbourg regulars have a fixed hotel reservation, which they hand over to a 'successor' when they stop travelling to Strasbourg on a monthly basis. Occasional visitors are forced to go for second-best. Hotels often insist on a three-night minimum stay, and the introduction of the Assistants' Statute has resulted in more MEPs bringing an assistant along to Strasbourg, thus increasing pressure on the available stock of rooms. In Brussels, most MEPs have their own apartment or can choose from a vast array of hotels that on all accounts are both better and cheaper than in Strasbourg.

In October 2010 the Parliament's travel agency informed Mr McMillan-Scott's office that there were no rooms left in central Strasbourg for either the November or the December 2010 plenary sessions. As a result, Parliament has been forced to hire a tourist boat to accommodate Members, staff and assistants. Strasbourg's tourist infrastructure is not designed or able to cope with the monthly influx of the enlarged EP and everything that comes with it.

An EP official confirmed this: "It's become harder to find hotels recently, especially if you don't come every month. I'm staying on a boat chartered by the Parliament now, on the Quai des Belges ironically!"<sup>87</sup> A Belgian assistant said: "Finding a hotel is always a problem for occasional visitors"<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Alexander Alvaro MEP, 7 December 2010.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with a EP secretariat official, 24 November 2010.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with a Belgian MEP assistant, 24 November 2010.

A British MEP confirmed that accommodation for visitors is a problem, and says it also impacts on his work:

"Accommodation is not a problem for me personally. I took over from another MEP. It's dead man's shoes! You have to wait for someone to vacate a room. For visitors it's simply impossible - they're 20-30 kms away. There was one month when my assistant couldn't get accommodation - so I didn't have anyone with me."<sup>89</sup>

Many complain about the prices of hotels in Strasbourg. A senior official said: "A hotel during a session here costs €185. Outside of Parliament weeks it costs €100! The same is true for restaurants"<sup>90</sup>. An Italian assistant agreed:

"I was staying in the same hotel, which was very expensive for the service offered. It's crazy, but hotels in Strasbourg have very high prices when we're there. If you call for the same room during a non-plenary week, it's 20-25 per cent less. I finally now co-rent an apartment. I now have the opportunity to rest. The people in hotels and taxis also aren't very friendly. Taxis don't take reservations and there's a taxi war going on between taxis from Strasbourg and communes outside Strasbourg, meaning there's a shortage during session weeks. The infrastructure is not adequate for when the Parliament is there."<sup>91</sup>

As was done with travel, a check was carried out for this report in the week of 6 December to assess the availability and price of accommodation in Brussels in the week of 10 January and in Strasbourg in the week of 17 January.

For Brussels, the cheapest hotel available on Expedia.com, a popular travel website, for three nights starting on Monday 10 January, was Hotel Aristote, for a total of €117. This hotel is in the historic centre of Brussels, a few metro stops from the Parliament. The New Hotel Charlemagne in the EU quarter cost €260 for 3 nights. The cost of the Brussels Hilton was €537 for three nights.

By contrast, in Strasbourg the cheapest option available near the Parliament from 17 to 20 January 2011 is the Appart Hotel Victoria Gardens, which costs €243 for three nights, i.e. more than double the cost of the cheapest hotel in Brussels. The author of this report - who visited Strasbourg in November 2010 for the purposes of writing this report - can confirm from personal experience that it is not a pleasant place to stay in.

Three nights in the Strasbourg Hilton from 17-20 January 2011 cost €717. This compares to €417 for a three-day stay in the same hotel the week after, 24-27 January, when Parliament is no longer in session. In other words, the Hilton charges a premium of almost 60 per cent on its rooms during session weeks.

A check for the plenary week starting 13 December 2010 carried out in the week of 6 December, i.e. one week before, revealed an even more shocking state of affairs; there was no availability at all in the Hilton, and the only availability in the centre of Strasbourg were the Regent Petit France at €1.177 for 3 nights, or the Regent

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with a British MEP, 2 December 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with a senior EP Secretariat official, 24 November 2010.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with an Italian assistant, 7 December 2010.

Contades at €1.174. The cheapest option outside Strasbourg would have been €537 for the Holiday Inn at Illkirch, near the airport.

A political group official gave this account of his experience of the most recent Strasbourg session:

"Many colleagues, including myself, had again the unpleasant surprise of considerable price hikes in our hotels in Strasbourg.

In my hotel, Novotel Strasbourg Centre Les Halles, the price for the February session will be 202 euros/night, whereas for the other sessions of 2011 the price will be 189 euros/night. Previously, I paid 179 euros/night, which is already a lot. In comparison, the same weekly nights outside parliamentary sessions are sold for 90 euros/night (checked that from hotels.com for March 14-17). Rates in Novotel New York Times Square start from 112 euros/night!

The reimbursement ceiling for EP officials is 150 euros/night, so prices exceeding that are paid by the officials themselves.

People are very annoyed with this right now. In a meeting this morning, I asked my colleagues, and 8 out of 10 had received a price hike for this session.

Of course, it is understandable hotels may adjust their prices once a year, but it feels so unjust when we are obliged to accept the greed of the Strasbourg hoteliers."<sup>92</sup>

### Working conditions

The Parliament's monthly move has an impact on the wellbeing of MEPs, assistants, officials and others who make the trip. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people are under greater stress due to *transhumance*, and that those with young families in particular suffer. As the author of this report noted in a 2003 paper with Nick Clegg, the current British Deputy Prime Minister and at the time also an MEP:

"What is perhaps less obvious is the debilitating effect that the endless travel inflicts on MEPs themselves. A parliamentary job is always peripatetic since constituencies and parliaments are by definition in different locations. But the requirement to travel between three different countries – Belgium, France and home country – imposes a unique burden upon MEPs (excluding, of course, the happy minority who represent the constituencies of Brussels and Strasbourg).

Travel may well nourish the soul. But ceaseless travel on Europe's increasingly erratic short-haul airline network is guaranteed to disorientate even the most tranquil soul. A disproportionate amount of an MEP's time is spent in fruitless travel. Such frenetic movement means that MEPs must compress their working time in the Parliament into relatively short bursts, which merely undermines the quality of the work achieved. The split location of the EP is especially hard on MEPs with young families. In our view, there is no conceivable justification left to maintain the present arrangement"<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Email message from a political group official, 21 January 2011.

<sup>93</sup> Nick Clegg and Michiel van Hulten, *Reforming the EP*, Foreign Policy Centre, London, May 2003, pp. 17-18.

A British MEP agreed: "It's also a welfare issue. Everyone has to undertake this trek 12 times a year. It's wasting our lives"<sup>94</sup>.

A former interpreter said the work in Strasbourg was more stressful:

"There are fewer rest facilities for interpreters in Strasbourg. Many hang around in the bar when there's nothing to do. It doesn't impact on the quality of their work, but cramming everything into four days makes it tough on them. They do 12-hour shifts. In Brussels it's more evenly spread, with longer lunch breaks. You waste a day travelling, which costs about €700-800 – the cost of a day of interpreting. There are many more languages now – so the costs are higher as well. There's far more interpretation, there are far more support staff. Interpreters are stress-sensitive people. And the stress is much higher in Strasbourg than in Brussels."<sup>95</sup>

An Italian MEP assistant said the week in Strasbourg had negative effects on people's health:

"After a week in Strasbourg I'm destroyed. I'm tired. Everybody's tired. Strasbourg's much more stressful. We work very late in Strasbourg - and then there's no option but to go out for dinner. In Brussels you can just go home and have a bite. Many people complain about allergies and stress, about digestion problems. You don't sleep well, you're not in your own home. Most assistants work in their Member's office, which is a very small space. It's easy to catch a flu"<sup>96</sup>.

A Finnish MEP assistant pointed out the effect on family life:

"It makes family life very difficult. This has been the case for my MEP who has a young family with whom he would be able to spend more time if he would not have to travel to Strasbourg each month"<sup>97</sup>.

An official confirmed this:

"I have a rotten time. I miss my kids and my wife. You lose half a day going there, half a day going back. There's no justification for that. OK, there's a slightly different ambience, and it's true that you socialise in a way that you don't in Brussels, but if you really wanted to you could do it in Brussels too. Even in Strasbourg it's not by choice, it's mandatory! I make a point of always having a quiet evening in. I suppose a lot of people have quite a lonely time in Strasbourg"<sup>98</sup>.

Yet another said it forces him and his wife to make work choices they wouldn't otherwise have to make: "My wife and I had a big problem this week. She had to cancel her mission"<sup>99</sup>.

A Belgian assistant commented on the difficulties for parents:

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with a British MEP, 2 December 2010.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with a EP secretariat official, 24 November 2010.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with an Italian assistant, 7 December 2010.

<sup>97</sup> Written comments from a Finnish MEP assistant, 26 November 2010.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 1 December 2010.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 24 November 2010.

"It's an assault on your social life. You're not home for four days, and when you get home you're exhausted. I can imagine that must be killing for a family. Last night I saw a colleague on the tram with her six month-old baby. In Brussels there are better childcare facilities - and in the evening you can go home of course."<sup>100</sup>

Not everyone was negative about having to spend time in Strasbourg. Jan Mulder said: "It's fine for assistants, and visitor groups like it in Strasbourg"<sup>101</sup>.

One Secretariat official felt she could cope, but pointed out the additional cost involved:

"It can be tough for parents. But it's not too bad. My husband handles it perfectly. Sometimes it's difficult to be away. For single mothers it's a nightmare. Sometimes parents have to choose, if they both work in the Parliament, which one of them goes to Strasbourg. It's certainly not easy with kids. Officials earn good money, but you also need to pay for childcare. One colleague told me that works out at about €500, 600 per plenary session. That's a lot, even for someone on a 3000 euro salary"<sup>102</sup>.

And a German MEP said, tongue-in-cheek: "At least the food is better in Strasbourg"<sup>103</sup>.

### Security

The one area where it appears Strasbourg has an edge over Brussels is security. The Brussels Parliament complex has seen a series of serious incidents in recent years, including several muggings just outside, and three armed robberies inside the Parliament building, the most recent on Friday 4 February 2011. Both Brussels and Strasbourg regularly experience thefts from offices.

The Strasbourg buildings are considered to present safety hazards and design faults, including inadequate railings to prevent falls<sup>104</sup>. A Secretariat official said: "I get the feeling this place isn't properly maintained. In Brussels there's always people screwing in light bulbs. Wheelchair access is better in Brussels as well"<sup>105</sup>.

### Luxembourg

A final issue to consider is the Parliament's presence in Luxembourg. Luxembourg is the official location of the Parliament's Secretariat. As the centre of gravity of the Parliament moved to Brussels in the 1980s and 1990s, Luxembourg became concerned the Parliament might leave for Brussels altogether. In a 1996 exchange of letters, the then-President of the Parliament, Klaus Hänsch, gave an undertaking that a significant proportion of the Secretariat's staff would always remain in Luxembourg, the mid-point between Brussels and Strasbourg.

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with a Belgian MEP assistant, 24 November 2010.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Jan Mulder MEP, 23 November 2010.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 23 November 2010.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with a German MEP, 1 December 2010.

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEJA0zyu9Hg>

<sup>105</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 24 November 2010.

There are obvious costs involved in having a Secretariat based in Luxembourg, and not in Parliament's main place of work, Brussels. But most of the staff based in Luxembourg (such as those dealing with translation or finance) don't need to travel to Brussels or Strasbourg on a regular basis, and similarly most Brussels-based staff don't travel to Luxembourg often, if ever. Electronic communications have significantly reduced the need to transfer documents and other physical goods between Luxembourg on the one hand and Brussels and Strasbourg on the other.

One German MEP expressed concern about the arrangement:

"I'm worried about half of the secretariat being in Luxembourg. I can live with two places of work but not with three. For us as Members, the Luxembourg people are far away. The legal service, the health insurance people - I would like to be able to talk to them. When it's cold in a meeting room in Brussels, you have to phone Luxembourg!"<sup>106</sup>

Others disagreed. According to one official:

"Luxembourg is not such a problem now. Most of the communications now are electronic. I have a budget for Brussels-Luxembourg travel missions for my staff, and it's not very much. There's no compelling case to move translators or financial staff to Brussels. There's no loss of efficiency and there are no huge additional costs involved. Most staff are quite happy to be there. The salary weighting is the same as for Brussels, so there's no additional cost"<sup>107</sup>.

Tom Morgan, member of the Staff Committee on behalf of the SGPOE trade union, said, speaking in a personal capacity: "People who work in Luxembourg are generally happy to be there – those who don't like Luxembourg tend to leave."<sup>108</sup>

But a senior official considered that the agreement with Luxembourg would need updating:

"The costs of Luxembourg are defensible. But having half the Parliament's staff based in Luxembourg, as foreseen by the agreement with the Luxembourg government, is no longer tenable. It's more realistic to keep expenditure on EP services in Luxembourg at the same level"<sup>109</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with a German MEP, 1 December 2010.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 1 December 2010.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Tom Morgan, 23 November 2010.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with a senior EP Secretariat official, 25 November 2010.

#### 4. POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

##### **The logic of a single Seat**

With three exceptions (a Secretariat official, the French Permanent Representative and the Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg) the arguments put forward during the research for this report would lead to the EP having a single Seat, in Brussels. Most MEPs are fond of Strasbourg as a city and say they would miss it despite the logistical difficulties - but they think it would be more efficient and politically more effective to be based in Brussels. As one MEP said: "I love Strasbourg as a city - it's far superior to Brussels. But that's not the point"<sup>110</sup>. A Secretariat official said: "Strasbourg creates a 'beltway' feeling. But the two sessions in Brussels when the ceiling collapsed were very successful"<sup>111</sup>.

As shown in chapter 2 of this report, it was always the intention of both Council and Parliament that Parliament should have its permanent base in the same city as the other two Institutions, Commission and Council. Even Strasbourg City Council argued for a single Seat as far back as in 1952:

"In order to facilitate the operation and work and to diminish the cost of the institutions of the Treaty of 18th April, 1951 as well as of the other European organizations contemplated or planned - which will necessarily be the nucleus of the future European administration - it will be highly important and essentially desirable to group these institutions."<sup>112</sup>

Strasbourg, of course, intended for them to be grouped in the Alsatian capital, where the Council of Europe was already based. Today, moving all three to Strasbourg is no longer a realistic prospect. Basing the Parliament there full-time would both undermine the logic of a single Seat for the three Institutions as well as, very likely, completely destroy Strasbourg's unique character as a historic regional capital. As Cecilia Malmström explained on Oneseat.eu:

"Strasbourg is indeed a very important European city as it symbolises the peace between France and Germany. One could of course envisage having the Parliament meeting only in Strasbourg. That is however difficult for a number of reasons. The EP today has grown in size and in competencies. It is not possible to be located all year round in Strasbourg, the city is too small and does not have these facilities. Furthermore it is problematic to control the Council and the Commission when they are located in another country. I believe that the EP should play an important role in European decision making, but it suits many ministers fine that the Parliament is not taken seriously by the citizens. From a media perspective it is difficult for many papers/radio/TV channels to afford sending people to Strasbourg every session so we therefore get less attention and scrutiny, which is also bad from a democratic point of view."<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Interview with a British MEP, 2 December 2010.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 24 November 2010.

<sup>112</sup> Strasbourg City Council resolution of 25 Feb 1952, European Navigator.

<sup>113</sup> Cecilia Malmström, *Why the One Seat Campaign?*, [www.oneseat.eu](http://www.oneseat.eu) .

Brussels, on the other hand, is well equipped to welcome the Parliament full-time. Moving from a three-week to a four-week monthly presence is unlikely to have any significant impact on travel, accommodation or other logistical issues. Assuming the Secretariat would remain in Luxembourg, there would be no intrinsic need for additional buildings in Brussels to accommodate the skeleton staff currently based in Strasbourg, whose work is in any case linked exclusively to the Parliament's monthly presence there.

Minister Vanraes, Deputy Prime Minister of the Brussels Region said the Parliament is welcome in Brussels:

"I'm convinced the EU should be based in Brussels. 80% of the Brussels population are happy to have the EU here. The Parliament is welcome in Brussels! The European Commission has submitted plans for the redevelopment of the EU quarter over the next 10 years. The Parliament should use the opportunity to indicate what it would like to see happen in terms of its buildings and infrastructure."<sup>114</sup>

Minister Vanraes said that an architect had been appointed to oversee this vast new project, which will reshape the EU quarter of Brussels with, for example, the construction of a four-towered new high-rise to replace the Commission's Berlaymont building - which has seen its own structural problems - and other Commission buildings and to complement the Justus Lipsius Council building. He said that he had no approaches from the EP as to how it might integrate with these new structures and associated landscaping.

In a paper entitled "Brussels, capital of Europe; a sustainable choice?", academics Philippe Van Parijs and Jonathan Van Parys examine various criteria and attaching to a number of EU cities, including Strasbourg and Luxembourg. Their analysis of 'diplomatic', 'demographic', 'metropolitan' and 'civic' centres of gravity leads to the conclusion that "Brussels will continue to strengthen its position as the civic centre of gravity of the European Union".

However, the French Permanent Representative to the EU warned that France would not let the Parliament go without a fight:

"We are quite open to this dialogue. The opinion of Members is very important to us, but France will defend Strasbourg very strongly. I hope the Parliament will respect the Treaty in deciding on the calendar for 2012 and I urge you not to engage in polemics that will damage Europe's standing. That would only play into the hands of the Eurosceptics."<sup>115</sup>

And the mayor of Strasbourg defended his city as Seat of the Parliament in a joint press release with Cathérine Trautmann MEP issued on 29 October 2010 in response to the announcement of the Seat Study Group by Mr McMillan-Scott:

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<sup>114</sup> Minister Vanraes, Deputy Prime Minister of the Brussels Region, speaking in a meeting with Mr McMillan-Scott and the author, 7 December 2010.

<sup>115</sup> Mr Philippe Etienne, Permanent Representative of France to the EU, speaking in a meeting with Mr McMillan-Scott and the author, 7 December 2010.

"The legitimacy of Strasbourg is derived not only from law, but, more importantly, from History. As a city that symbolises Franco-German reconciliation, it is the European capital of peace, democracy and human rights. Strasbourg is quite naturally the place that expresses the universal values shared by all European States. The vision of the Founding Fathers of European unity rests above all on a certain idea of a polycentric and democratic Europe, close to the citizens of Europe.

The question, therefore, is not that of the seat but that of the places of work of the EP. It is not a question of pitting the three capitals - Strasbourg, Brussels and Luxembourg – against each other, but of uniting them in an approach of complementarity.

This is the whole point, for example, of the joint statement of 10 September 2010 signed by the Mayors of Strasbourg, Brussels and Luxembourg, calling for the rapid completion of the EuroCapRail project, one of the 30 priority projects under the Trans European Transport Network, in order to "improve the quality, performance and frequency of rail links" between their three cities, which are the seats of European institutions."<sup>116</sup>

However, in its 2010 review of funding for Trans European Transport Networks, the European Commission announced it was slashing funding for EuroCapRail. For the upgrade of the Brussels-Luxembourg portion, it announced that funding would be cut from €30 million to €21 million. For the Luxembourg-Strasbourg portion, funding would be cut from €27 to €3,5 million. In the introductory paragraph, the Commission states that funding is being slashed for projects that are "no longer credible"<sup>117</sup>.

In a meeting with Mr McMillan-Scott in Strasbourg on December 15, the deputy mayor of Strasbourg for European and International Affairs, Mrs Nawel Rafik-Elmrini insisted that a "poly-centric" European Union was the most desirable option. She also referred to the new facilities which the City of Strasbourg was planning to provide to make the 'international sector' more privileged there. This 'Wacken' project is based on the demolition of a 1920s trade and exhibition complex next to the EP and some landscaping improvements. No information about this project could be found online.

### **Alternatives for France and Strasbourg**

Those interviewed for this report were unanimous in their view that if the Parliament moves to Brussels, alternatives will have to be found, both for France as a member state and for Strasbourg as a city.

Jan Mulder said: "You need to offer France a good alternative. By holding the European Council meetings in Strasbourg for instance"<sup>118</sup>. Another MEP said: "Of course it's hard on Strasbourg if the Parliament leaves. You need to find compensation"<sup>119</sup>. A senior MEP concurred:

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<sup>116</sup> Press release from the mayor of Strasbourg, Roland Ries and Cathérine Trautmann MEP, 29 October 2010.

<sup>117</sup> Transport: Commission reviews funding for 92 major Trans-European Networks infrastructure projects, European Commission, Brussels, 27 October 2010.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Jan Mulder MEP, 23 November 2010.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with an Austrian MEP, 24 November 2010.

"We all understand the symbolism. But it's out of date. Of course we have to find them something else. Even taxi drivers in Strasbourg say: we have one week of feast, then three of famine. It would be better to have something more moderate but stable"<sup>120</sup>.

Bart Staes said it wouldn't be easy to address the economic issue:

"Strasbourg is about symbolism, and it's about money. You need a solution for both. The economic impetus created by the 7.000-8.000 visitors who visit Strasbourg each time is huge. They don't just visit the Parliament, they also visit the region and go on wine tours. Dealing with the symbolism is the easy part: give Strasbourg the European Council. And the Seat of the European President. That doesn't solve the economic problem. Strasbourg should have gone for something like the European Technology Institute, but now it's too late for that"<sup>121</sup>.

Former MEP and current Commissioner Cecilia Malmström, speaking in 2006:

"I have the greatest respect for this [Strasbourg as a symbol of Franco-German reconciliation] and think that this memory should be honoured by either transforming the Strasbourg Parliament building in to the first real trans-European university with researchers, professors and students from all over the world. Another alternative would be that all the European Council summits were held there, thus guaranteeing the prestige and international importance of the city."<sup>122</sup>

One interviewee, a pro-Strasbourg EP Secretariat official was sceptical, however:

"What do you do with this building when the Parliament leaves? It leads to enormous losses. If you want to leave you need to find a creative solution that has something to offer the city. It's symbolic, too. A nice building along the Rhine. It's recognisable, and a good brand is worth something too. Not a single member state wants to reopen the debate. The One Seat campaign was a success, but there's no longer any enthusiasm. The Germans and the French are for Strasbourg, the Brits keep quiet. Luxembourg and Belgium don't want anything to do with it. People are not specifically for Brussels. Strasbourg has advantages too; with better facilities MEPs would be prepared to stay. Moving the European Council to Strasbourg doesn't solve things - it has prestige, but it doesn't yield economic benefits."<sup>123</sup>.

### Achieving change

"Any change in the current system would need to be part of a new treaty, agreed unanimously by all 27 Member States and ratified by each of their national parliaments."<sup>124</sup>

It is almost universally recognised in the Parliament that with the current Treaty text and given the ECJ's jurisprudence, a change in the official Seat of the Parliament would require a Treaty change. While further piecemeal adjustments to the current Calendar of meetings may be possible without contravening the Treaty (one example

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with a senior MEP, 1 December 2010.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Bart Staes MEP, 23 November 2010.

<sup>122</sup> Cecilia Malmström, *Why the One Seat Campaign?*, [www.oneseat.eu](http://www.oneseat.eu)

<sup>123</sup> Interview with a EP Secretariat official, 23 November 2010.

<sup>124</sup> Frequently Asked Questions about MEPs and the EP, [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu)

is the idea to hold the two September plenary sessions in the same week), a permanent change in the status quo formally requires unanimous agreement among member states. Thus, the way forward most Members seem to favour is to raise the issue in the context of Treaty change. One option would be to do so in the next wide-ranging Intergovernmental Conference, which could however be a long way off. Another, potentially more promising route could be to tag it on to the next accession Treaty, probably Croatia in late-2011 or more likely 2012.

If the Parliament is to achieve the objective of a single Seat in Brussels, two key obstacles must be overcome. The first is the lack of a united front. The second is member state apathy.

The Seat issue continues to be a sensitive one within the Parliament. But the perception that Brussels and Strasbourg are defended purely along nationality lines is no longer supported by the facts. Many French MEPs privately express dissatisfaction with Strasbourg and prefer Brussels, which even for them is often more convenient.

Alexander Alvaro, one of the most vocal advocates of a single Seat in Brussels, argues the Parliament should act now:

"It's now time to look ahead to what would be representative of a future Europe. Of an accountable, responsible Union. This should also be reflected in our working methods. You can't preach water but drink wine. One member state has to start the debate. But the Parliament should help by having a position: do we want it, or don't we? We need a trigger to start the discussion."<sup>125</sup>

A senior EP official sighed: "What is needed is a grassroots revolt"<sup>126</sup>.

One German MEP called for a short, sharp debate in the run-up to the next Treaty change:

"It's not in our interest to have an on-going fight about this. I don't want a never-ending discussion. But we should have the courage to put it on the agenda for the next Treaty change. That will give us six months of hell to discuss it, but at least we'll have a decision. You can always find compensation for Strasbourg. I'm quite sure the House would decide for Brussels - but I'm a democrat, so I would accept any decision. I want an efficient policy-making institution. Even the French know it. Any discussion starts with some fair offers. It should be a discussion on 'we as a Parliament decide' - not on Brussels versus Strasbourg."<sup>127</sup>

MEPs seemed confident that if they could get the Parliament to take a position, they would also be able to mobilise national governments. The new Dutch and UK governments are both officially committed to securing a single Seat for the Parliament.

Several compromise solutions came up during the interviews for this report, including the idea of giving Parliament the right to decide its own Seat, but only from a future

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with Alexander Alvaro MEP, 7 December 2010.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with a senior EP official, 25 November 2010.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with a German MEP, 1 December 2010.

date onwards. Others suggested transferring NATO to Strasbourg following France's decision to re-join its military command structure.

In October 2008, Frieda Brepoels, a Flemish MEP (Greens/EFA), launched a detailed plan for a 'seat swap' between the EP and the Brussels-based Committee of the Regions that could yet point the way forward:

"(...) My proposal goes as follows: the European Parliament will have its seat in Brussels and the Committee of the Regions together with the European Social and Economic Committee will take their seat in Strasbourg.

Why this proposal? The members of both advisory Committees work primarily in their home countries, either as elected representatives at local or regional level, or as representatives of civil society. Their European mandate requires that they meet regularly in Brussels or elsewhere in Europe. As a result, they do not have a fixed place of work. This is the fundamental difference between Committee Members and Members of the European Parliament, for whom their European mandate is their principal job and Brussels their key place of work. My proposal would thus generate drastic savings, not least by vastly reducing costs for the transferal of personnel and dossiers.

Furthermore, the use of the infrastructure in place would be optimised. The buildings in Strasbourg have capacity for 785 MEPs. This is largely sufficient for the members of both Committees (having 344 members each) who would be able to use these buildings throughout the year for their meetings. (If the European Parliament was to continue using Strasbourg, the buildings would remain empty for 40 weeks per year.) In Brussels, the buildings of both Committees are located in the European Quarter which means that they could easily be used by the other EU-Institutions.

My proposal also takes into account the historical significance of Strasbourg. The clustering of the Council of Europe, The European Court for Human Rights, together with both Committees, could offer the Alsace Region many economic opportunities.

Above all however, my proposal will lead to better links between the institutions. (...)"<sup>128</sup>

This and other ideas should be explored further by the Brussels-Strasbourg Seat Study Group, with a view to finding a solution that can count on broad support both within and outside the EP. As EP Vice-President Roberta Angelilli (EPP, Italy) said at a 2007 press conference:

"Beyond the constant reliance on the Treaty or purely bureaucratic or legal issues, the problem of the double seat of the European Parliament must be confronted seriously. We must find, in fact, a way to eliminate waste and streamline our working arrangements and the question of Strasbourg cannot be left in oblivion.

The European Parliament is the only body directly elected by European citizens and the hundreds of thousands of signatures collected against the dual seat cannot remain a dead letter."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Frieda Brepoels, "Stop the travelling EU circus", 23 October 2008, <http://www.friedabrepoels.eu/mening/nationaal/nieuws/opinie/stop-het-reizend-circus-naar-straatsburg> (English translation received from the office of Mrs Brepoels)

<sup>129</sup> <http://www.angelilli.it/it/page.asp?VisImg=S&Art=2772&Cat=1&IdTipo=0&TB=Comunicati%20Stampa&CCA=27&IdMenu=90&IdMenu2=75>

## 5. CONCLUSION

In 1958, the newly-created European Assembly ignored a recommendation from member states to elect an Italian as its first President. Instead it opted for a Frenchman, Robert Schuman.

The EP has shown an independent streak ever since. What is clear from the interviews conducted for this report, is that more than anything else MEPs believe they, and they alone should have the right to determine Parliament's working arrangements, including the location of its Seat.

It has been suggested that if the Parliament is keen to have a single Seat, it could opt to be based permanently in Strasbourg. But being located far away from the other two big players in the institutional triangle would severely hamper its ability to carry out its duties under the Treaty, especially now the Parliament shares full co-legislative powers with the Council and takes its control function vis-à-vis the Commission and new EU Foreign Service (EEAS) ever more seriously.

Furthermore, while many MEPs (as well as their assistants, Parliament's officials and political group staff) express a fondness for the city of Strasbourg (and some even say they enjoy the monthly stay there), most believe the city is ill-equipped to host the vast international institution the EP has become following successive rounds of enlargement. Travel links are inadequate, accommodation is scarce and overpriced; working conditions are cramped.

It is clear that given a free choice most MEPs today would choose Brussels, where the Parliament already conducts most of its work.

Most MEPs believe the cost of maintaining two seats cannot be justified, they resent the additional stress and the loss of productivity caused by the monthly trek to Strasbourg, and they are concerned about the impact of the two-seat arrangement on the Parliament's public image.

They recognise that in order to base the Parliament permanently in Brussels, a probable Treaty change - and a lot of patience - are required. France and Strasbourg must be presented with suitable alternatives, and other member states must be prepared to give up something in return.

With the Lisbon Treaty in force for just over a year, Parliament is showing renewed appetite for improving the way it functions. The additional responsibilities that have been bestowed upon it by Lisbon, as well as the realisation that a Parliament made up of 27 different nationalities no longer bears any resemblance to an Assembly comprising just six, make it essential to change the way it organises its business. The EP has set up working group to explore ways to make plenary sessions more attractive. Other initiatives are also underway. If the political will is there and an open debate is allowed to take place, the Seat question can be placed firmly back on the agenda.

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One Seat ([www.oneseat.eu](http://www.oneseat.eu))

Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))

Brussels-Strasbourg Seat Study Group ([www.BrusselsStrasbourgStudy.eu](http://www.BrusselsStrasbourgStudy.eu))

ANNEX 1

**Location of European Institutions (EU in bold)**

*(Italics: groups/bodies connected with but not EU institutions)*

**BRUSSELS**

**European Parliament**

**European Commission**

**European Council (The Treaty of Nice establishes Brussels as the venue for all formal summits of the European Council after 2004)**

**Council of the European Union**

**Committee of the Regions**

**Economic and Social Committee**

**European Defence Agency**

Eurocontrol

*(NATO and WEU (until June 2011) are also in Brussels)*

*European Political Parties, e.g.*

*European People's Party (EPP)*

*European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR)*

*Party of European Socialists (PES)*

*European Green Party (EGP)*

*Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR)*

**STRASBOURG**

**European Parliament**

**European Ombudsman**

European Court of Human Rights

Council of Europe

Eurocorps (a Franco-German joint military initiative)

**LUXEMBOURG**

**European Parliament**

**European Court of Justice**

**Court of Auditors**

**European Investment Bank**

**Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union**

ANNEX 2

**Flights to Strasbourg and Brussels**

Only six EU capitals currently have a direct flight connection to Strasbourg. These are listed below for the January 2011 Strasbourg plenary week, also showing their frequency. Flights and frequency from the same cities to Brussels are below:

**To Strasbourg from:**

	<b>Brussels</b>	<b>Copenhagen</b>	<b>Lisbon</b>	<b>Madrid</b>	<b>Paris</b>	<b>Prague</b>
<b>17/1</b>	2	1	1	2	4	2
<b>18/1</b>	2	1		1	4	1
<b>19/1</b>	2	1		1	4	1
<b>20/1</b>	2	1		2	4	2
<b>21/1</b>	2	1	1	1	4	2

**To Brussels from:**

	<b>Strasbourg</b>	<b>Copenhagen</b>	<b>Lisbon</b>	<b>Madrid</b>	<b>Paris</b>	<b>Prague</b>
<b>17/1</b>	2	10	5	9	7	6
<b>18/1</b>	2	10	5	9	7	6
<b>19/1</b>	2	10	5	9	7	6
<b>20/1</b>	2	10	5	9	7	6
<b>21/1</b>	2	10	5	9	7	6

**ANNEX 3**

The academic European Parliament Research Group<sup>130</sup> conducts a **TRACKING SURVEY OF MEPS** every legislature, with response rates of between 23 and 31 %. The questionnaire always includes: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the powers of the European Parliament?" "**The European Parliament should be allowed to hold all its plenary sessions in Brussels**". In the interpretation below, 'pro-Brussels' is defined as 'agree' or 'agree strongly', and 'pro-Strasbourg' as 'disagree' or 'disagree strongly'.

Percentage of MEPs each year that was pro-Brussels, pro-Strasbourg or indifferent:

Year	Pro-Brussels	Neither	Pro-Strasbourg
2000	69%	10%	2%
2006	72	12	16
2010	70	16	14

There is a migration in opinion among French and German MEPs about Brussels/Strasbourg (answers to the same question as above):

	2000	2006	2010
<b>German</b>			
Agree strongly + Agree (%)	51,9	48,0	66,7
Neither (%)	7,4	16,0	16,7
Disagree + Disagree strongly (%)	40,7	36,0	16,7
<b>French</b>			
Agree strongly + agree (%)	13,6	5,9	27,3
Neither (%)	13,6	17,6	18,2
Disagree + Disagree strongly (%)	72,7	76,5	54,5

Results by political group (2010), rounded to the nearest full figure:

EP group	Pro-Brussels	Neither	Pro-Strasbourg
ALDE	88%	4%	8%
ECR	100	0	0
EFD	80	10	10
EPP	62	18	20
G/EFA	79	14	7
GUE/NGL	50	25	25
N-A	60	20	20
S&D	65	22	12

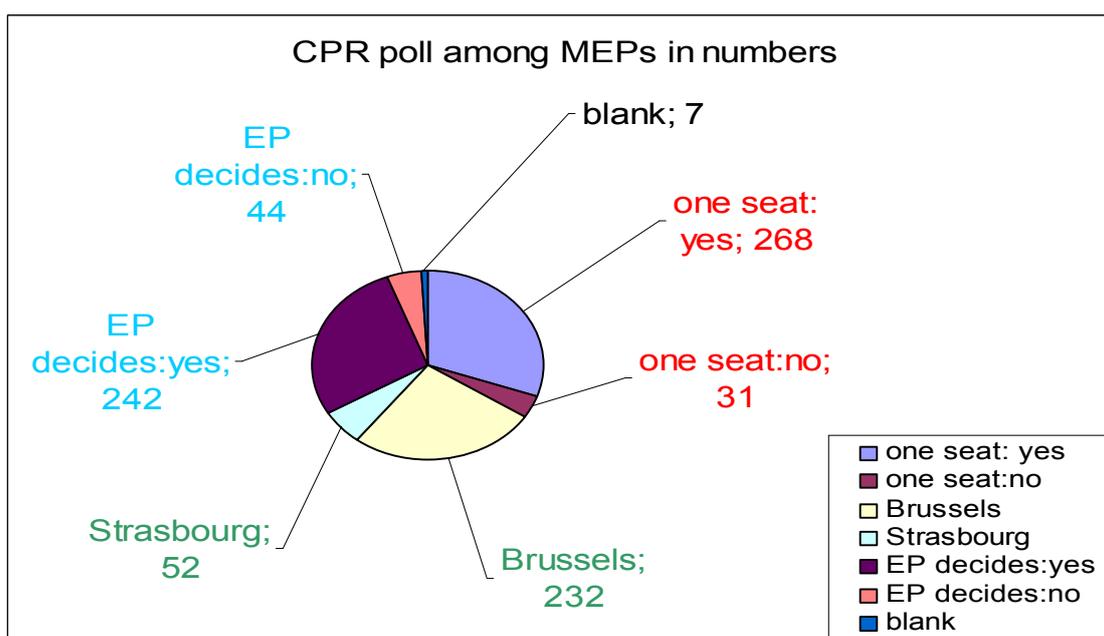
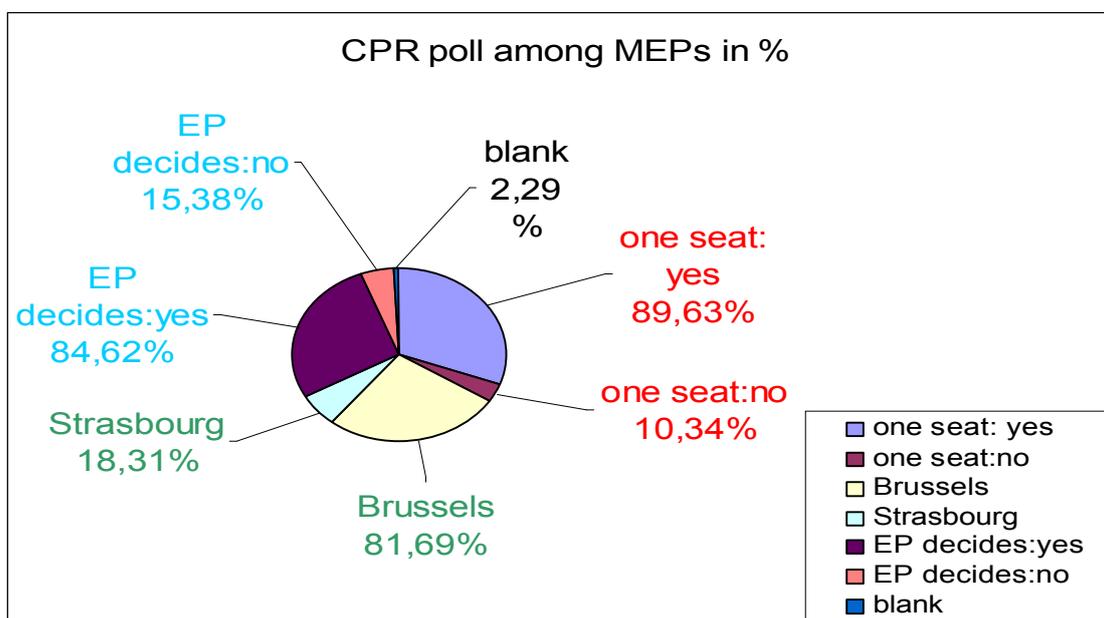
<sup>130</sup> Tracking Survey of MEPs conducted by the European Parliament Research Group: Simon Hix (LSE), David Farrell (University College Dublin), and Roger Scully (University of Wales, Aberystwyth).

ANNEX 4

**Campaign for Parliament Reform (CPR) survey on the Seat of Parliament (2007)**

CPR handed out 785 ballot sheets. 306 were returned. This means that 39% of MEPs participated. CPR received seven blank ballots. Not everybody replied to every question. In total 299 MEPs gave an opinion concerning the two seats. 284 gave an opinion concerning the location of the EP and 286 gave an opinion on whether the EP should be able to decide itself where it is located.

In favour of a single seat:	<b>90%</b>	Against:	<b>10%</b>
Yes the EP should decide:	<b>85%</b>	No:	<b>15%</b>
In favour of Brussels:	<b>82%</b>	Strasbourg:	<b>18%</b>



ANNEX 5

**Statistical breakdown of the 2011 Attitude Survey by the Psychology Department of the University of Zurich commissioned by the Seat Study Group.**

In order to enable a neutral and objective analysis of attitudes to the monthly move of the European Parliament between Brussels and Strasbourg, the informal cross-party ‘Brussels-Strasbourg Seat Study Group’ charged the University of Zurich with the survey at hand, thus guaranteeing a confidential, anonymous and impartial procedure.

A total of 2.260 MEPs and MEP Assistants were invited to respond electronically to a set of content-related questions. 417 persons, including 61 MEPs, compiled the survey, which corresponds to a response rate of 18,5%. Out of these, a large majority of 88% supported the proposition that “the Treaty should be amended to give Parliament the official right to decide its own Seat and place of work” (question number 4). Further, 91% of the participants would prefer Brussels as the only place “to hold all its plenary sessions” (question number 5). French and German respondents showed the least enthusiasm for Brussels but still preferred it to Strasbourg by large majorities (72% and 87% respectively).

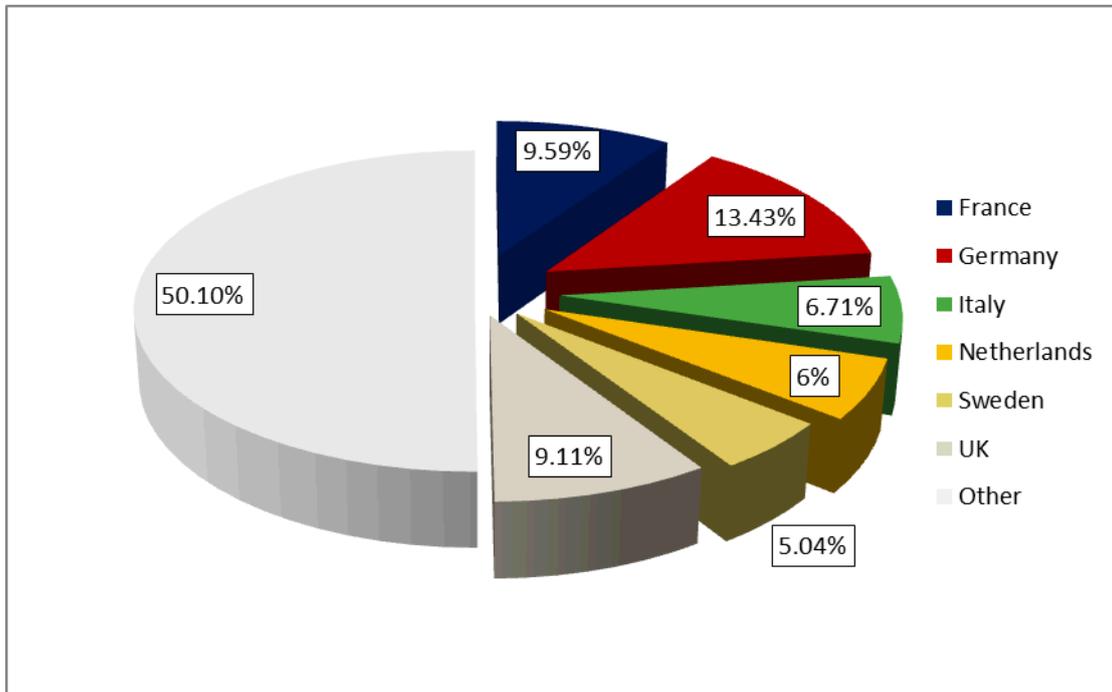
The most important determining factors for this choice (question number 7) were the cost aspects (44% of the participants rated this point as “extremely important”), the proximity of other EU institutions (41%), and the general working conditions (38%). In contrast, historic symbolism was rated as less important for this choice (21% rated this aspect as “not important”, while 5% rated it as “extremely important”).

When asked to rate several aspects of quality of life and work in both cities (question number 5), Brussels got particularly high and reliable values for its connections to international transport (38% of the participants rated this point as “excellent”), for its possibilities for networking and contact with interest groups (34% and 32% respectively), as well as for the ability to work efficiently (29%). In addition, no aspect was rated as “poor” or “extremely poor” by more than 3% for Brussels. In contrast, Strasbourg was reliably judged as “extremely poor” especially for its office environment (32%), its connections to international transports (27%), its family aspects (24%), and its accommodations (23%). The local transport of Strasbourg was the best rated aspect, with 8% of the participants judging it as “excellent”, followed by contact with media and networking, receiving the highest mark from 6% of the participants.

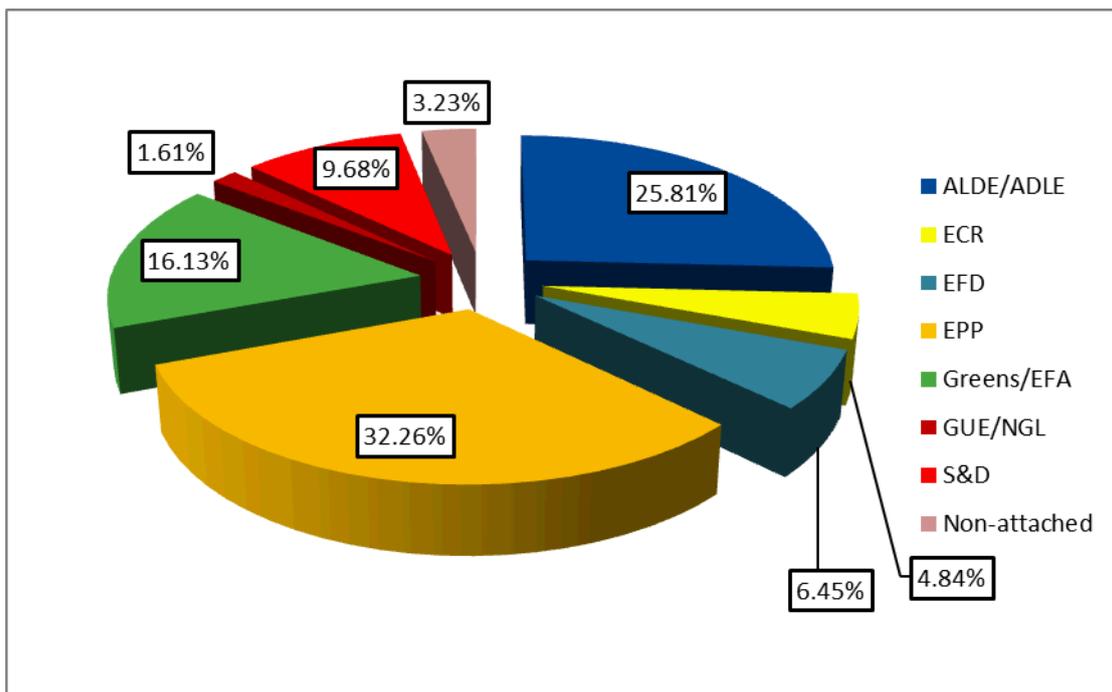
Finally, when asked to indicate “to what extent working in and commuting to Strasbourg affects working and personal life” (question number 8), work efficiency and work quality, as well as the mental health experience had the strongest impact (the mentioned aspects have an “extreme impact” or a “very high impact” for 39%, 31%, and 39% of the participants, respectively). With Brussels, none of these or other aspects have a substantial impact (i.e., an impact judged as “extreme” or “very high” by more than 15%).

▶ Invitees:	<i>n</i> = 2260	▶ MEP	61
▶ Response rate:	18.45%	▶ MEP Assistant	348
▶ Total:	417	▶ Other	4
		▶ Intern	4

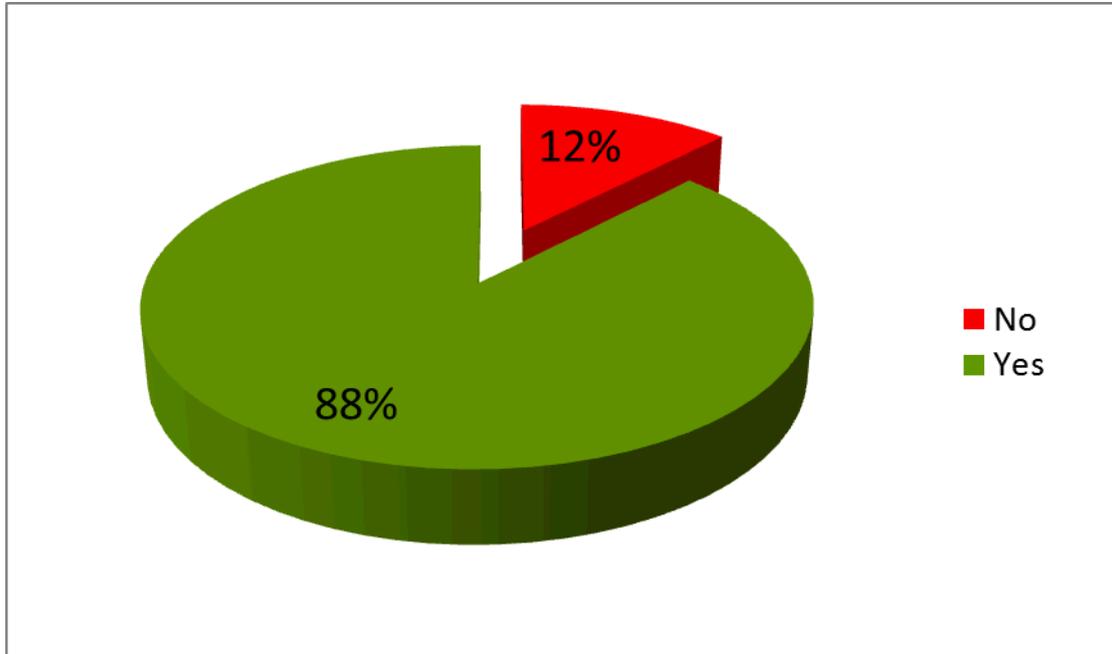
**By nationality**



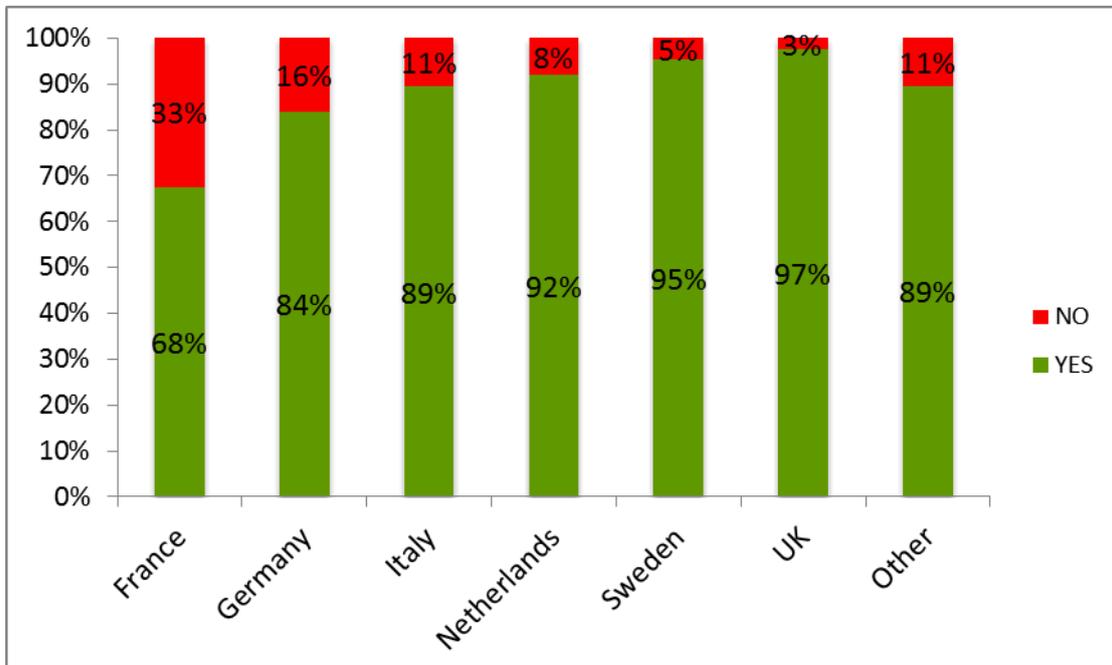
**By political group (MEPs only)**



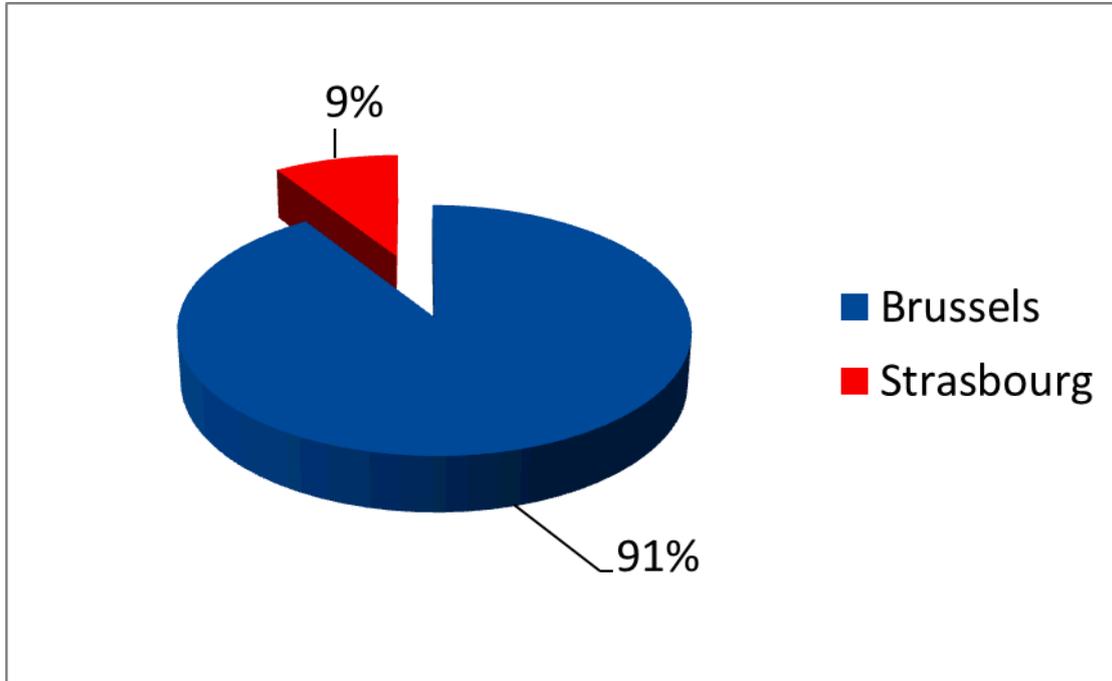
**Do you believe the Treaty should be amended to give Parliament the official right to decide its own Seat and places of work?**



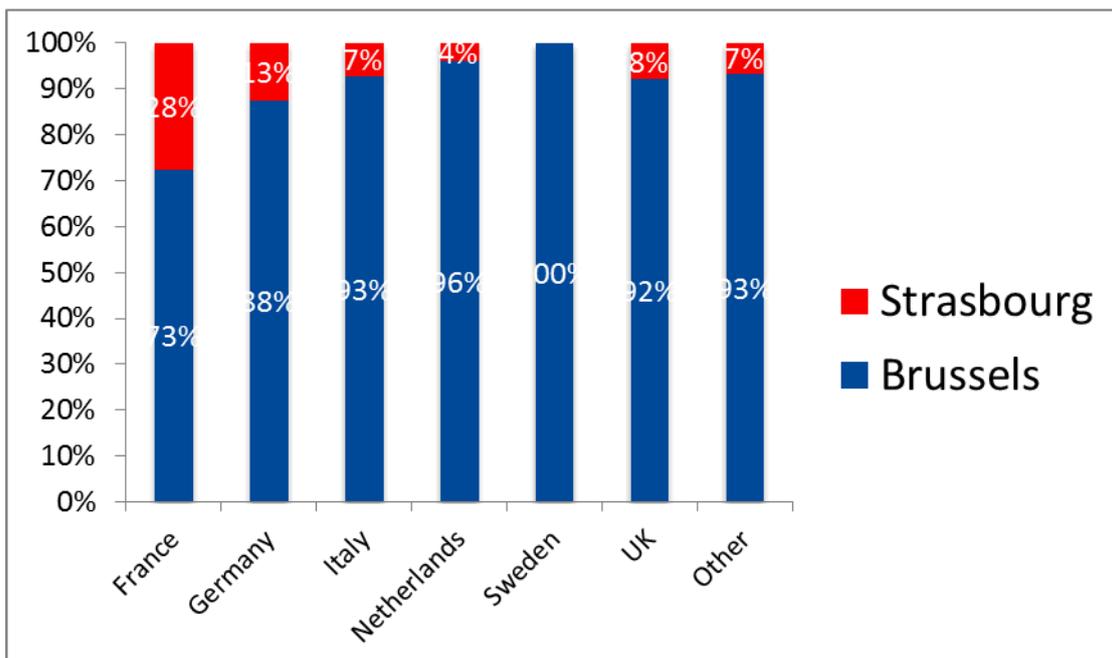
**Do you believe the Treaty should be amended to give Parliament the official right to decide its own Seat and places of work?**



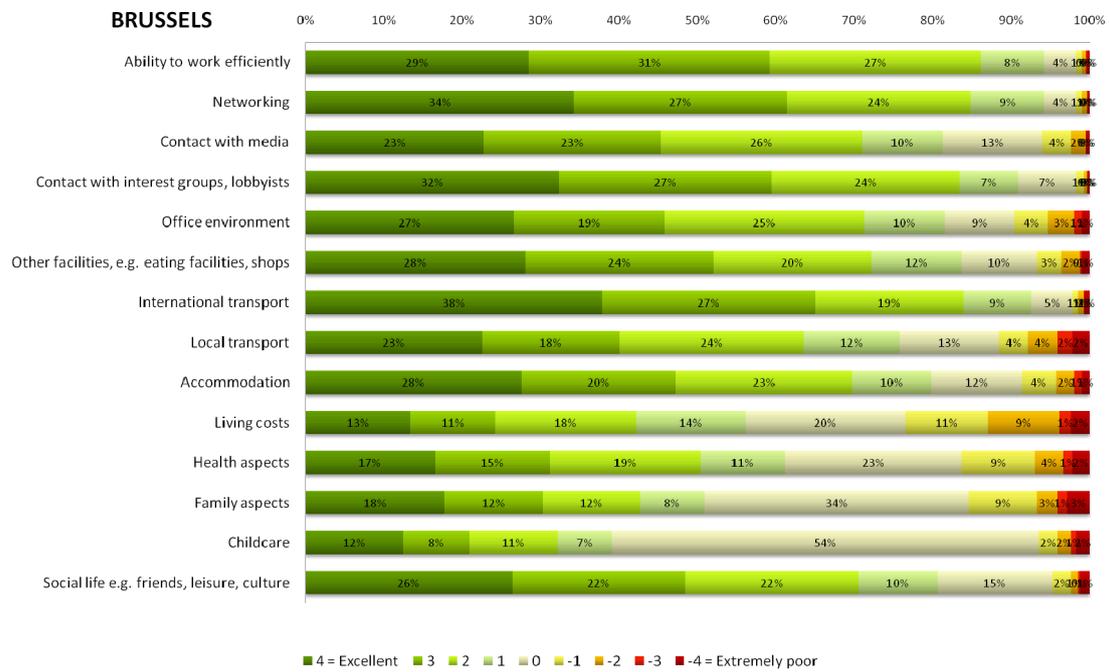
If the Parliament had the right to choose to hold all its plenary sessions in one place, which do you believe it should be?



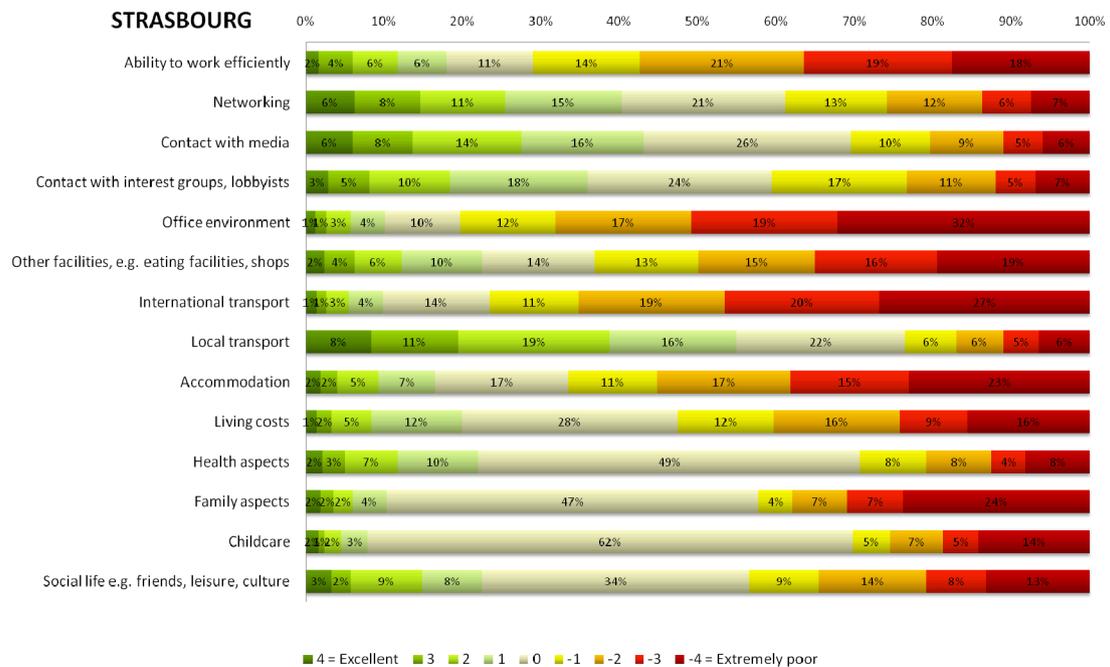
If the Parliament had the right to choose to hold all its plenary sessions in one place, which do you believe it should be?



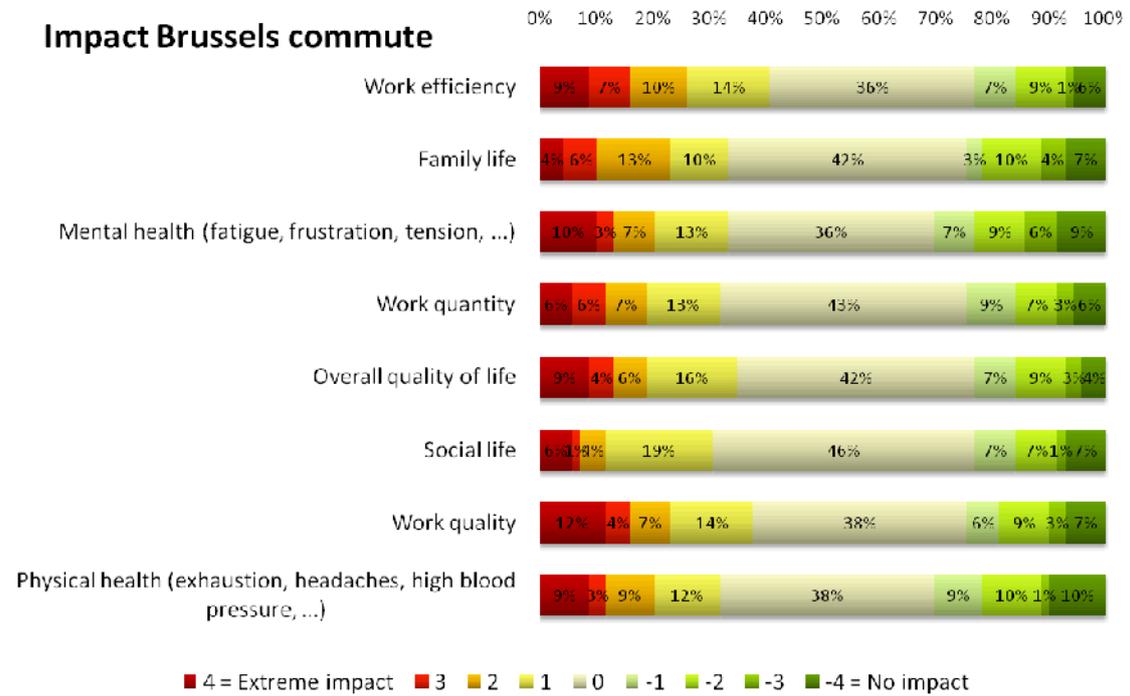
## Work and life in Brussels



## Work and life in Strasbourg



## Impact of commuting to Brussels



## Impact of commuting to Strasbourg

